UNITED FREE CHURCH SERMONS

TWENTY SERMONS BY FAMOUS SCOTCH PREACHERS

EDITED BY

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AND

D. P. THOMSON

With a Foreword by

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NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

EDITORS' PREFACE

THE United Free Church of Scotland is rich in great pulpit traditions, and preaching still occupies an honoured place in its many-sided ministry. It is in the conviction that the cherished traditions of the past are being maintained, and that our Church still continues to minister to the deepest needs of men by interpreting the message of Jesus Christ afresh in the light of contemporary thought, that we offer this volume to the public. It consists of sermons delivered in the course of their ordinary ministry by representative preachers of the Church. Such examples might be multiplied many-fold. It would be possible to offer a further selection quite as representative as the present from a Church so rich in preaching power as ours.

At the request of the publishers, one of the editors has contributed to the volume.

H. L. S.
D. P. T.

FOREWORD

THE collection of sermons which this volume contains should have a two-fold interest for the reader.

Most people will read it simply for the value of the sermons themselves, and will be in excellent company all the time. The seriousness with which the preachers treat their work, the character of the great themes which most of them choose, the clearness, sincerity and sympathy with men and women which mark these discourses as a whole, will be plain to the intelligent reader. The Church, we may surely say, is fortunate which can produce preachers of this quality.

There is, however, an additional ground of interest. The reader will find here abundant material for thought when he seeks to answer the question—How stands the Church of these preachers to the great verities of the faith? What themes are the Christian public mainly interested in? How does a varied and yet representative group of preachers conceive these themes? These sermons reveal not only the preachers who speak, but the congregations for whom they were written. For, as every real preacher knows, the congregation has a very large share in the making of the sermon.

Some caution, however, is necessary in making

one's estimates here. The primary purpose of the book to some extent obscures the second. The sermons nearly all presuppose audiences well-instructed already in Christian faith and ideals. In other words, they nearly all presuppose that the whole educational and evangelistic work of the Church has been successfully carried through, and that the hearers, moreover, have already acquired a considerable amount of experience in the Christian life.

Further, no attempt has been made to cover the whole field either of Christian faith, or of the practical ideals, missionary and social, in which the Church has shown itself deeply interested.

This volume does not profess, therefore, to give more than an example of what many of our most approved preachers are saying, and of what our congregations are thinking, of the great things of the Christian faith.

But what we have is full of interest and suggestion, and sometimes of deeply moving power. It reveals that we have a large number of people in our Churches who are interested in great themes, and who do not believe that "to be called upon to think in Church is to be invited to break the Sabbath day." Most important of all, it reveals a vital concern for the essential thing in the Christian religion, "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

DAVID S. CAIRNS

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I

WHERE TO LOOK FOR A BETTER WORLD

CHARLES ALLAN, M.A.

"Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart."—1 SAMUEL xvi. 7.

SAMUEL, choosing a ruler for Israel, has come by divine direction to Jesse's household, and as his eye lights on Eliab, the firstborn, he feels that his quest is over. Here indeed is a proper man, one built on great lines: in physique and bearing a very king among men.

Feeling the greatness and solemnity of the occasion, and conscious of a holy Presence near him, it seems to the prophet that God and God's chosen are standing face to face. "Surely," he murmurs, "the Lord's anointed is before Him."

But even as he speaks he becomes aware that he is wrong, and has surrendered too quickly to the report of his senses. For to his inner ear, so long attuned to catch heaven's wireless messages, comes the warning: "Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart."

So Eliab—Eliab with his goodly stature, with face and figure like a young god—passes out of the story, and one by one the other stalwart sons after him, until at last the youngest—at that crucial moment tending the sheep—is summoned. On him the choice falls, and on his head the anointing oil is poured. He too is goodly to look on, the glow of health on his cheeks, his countenance frank and open as the day. But the choice is determined by something deeper than all that, something in David's inner life, something pleasing in the eyes of Him who looketh upon the heart.

How wonderful these old Bible stories are. How simply, directly, inevitably they drive at the very centre, pierce to the very core of reality. *The Lord looketh on the heart:* how real it all is and how vital: pure gold: teaching for all time.

And nothing namby-pamby about it either. For David, as we remember, was no "plaster saint." The subsequent record is quite frank about that. He was a perfectly human man. He went wrong sometimes, and once terribly wrong. But the wonder about *that*, to anyone who thinks, who has the historical sense of time and situation, is not the sin but the pain it brought, the agony of soul, the sweat as of the man's very life blood that seems still to drop visibly on the pages that record his broken cries: the desolation of spirit following interrupted communion which was the essence of his punishment and the index to him of the enormity of his offence. Only to a big man,

a man sound at heart, an essentially great and noble man was such pain—pain of this intensity and quality and order—possible.

The Lord looketh on the heart. That is to say, when God seeks a man fit to be king, He does not ask how he looks, but what he is. The divine concern is not with the man's circumstances or appurtenances, but with himself; what he is fundamentally, at the centre and core of him. That is what counts when real issues are at stake and there is real work to do. Has the man soul, has he the root of the matter in him, is he alive and aware? Is he in touch with the realities about him and over him? Has he a spirit capable of answering to the call of the hour and listening to the directive impulses that come to him from above and beyond himself? Then he is the man God wants and the world needs; the man who counts, the man for a crisis, the man after God's own heart, who alone can serve the purposes of heaven in all the generations.

"Man looketh on the outward appearance." How true that has always been and is still. How superficial the world's judgment is, how easily influenced and deflected by surface appearances. Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? Is not this the Carpenter's son? Have we not here a travelling tent-maker? Oh! fools that we are, and blind! it is the soul of a man that counts: the soul that in its simple power and majesty can shake this old world to its foundations.

"God looketh on the heart." How much

greater *that* is, how much wiser; for the heart is dynamic, creative, central. Eliab looks big but David *is* big. He has a roomy heart, a loyal and tender heart, the courage of a soldier and the sensitiveness of a saint.

If God looks on the heart, it is there too we must look. For after all it is His world, and everything goes dreadfully wrong when we forget that simple but fundamental fact. Indeed with "God looketh on the heart" for text, you could re-write all history. The crumbled empires, the vanished pomps, the foiled ambitions, the world embracing plans that came to naught, all have this for epitaph and explanation. It is the lesson above all others which history teaches, and recent history not least. We must grow better hearts, cleaner hearts, more understanding hearts if the future is to be different from the past. We must devote new and purposeful attention to the things within, for always and everywhere they are the determining things.

The state of the world at any given period is only the state of its heart writ large: that and nothing more. Say ye not, lo here or lo there, for behold the kingdom of heaven is *within you.* The better world grows out of the better heart, not otherwise or otherwhere. Tinker at the Constitution as you will, alter this or alter that—and much can be usefully altered—if that is all you have altered you have really altered nothing. For the heart is the strategic point. It is the inner life that matters, the kind of souls men

have, the ideals that win their allegiance, the moral forces that sway their conduct, the power that rules at the deep centre of their lives. These are the things that make or mar the world: a fact which, to the thinking mind, supplies convincing evidence that the Power behind this universe is a spiritual power and the end contemplated a spiritual end. The Lord looketh on the heart. By the heart He judges all man's work, the civilizations he builds, the social fabric he erects, the thing he makes of it all. And if by this test it is condemned, condemned it is, and sooner or later crumbles in ruin abject and complete. If the wheels of God grind slowly they grind surely and they grind exceeding small. The Lord looketh on the heart. Nothing else counts. Nothing else in the long run avails: that in brief, but also in full, is the history of the world.

And what is the simple and inevitable conclusion to draw from this? Surely that the heart, the soul, the inner life must be given its rightful place—which is the first place—in the concerns of men. We hear much in these days of the decay of ancient reverences and loyalties, of the slow withering of the will and power to work, and other evidences of national and social deterioration. But what gain is there in bemoaning consequences and ignoring the causes from which the consequences come? If we neglect the heart and the things that train the heart, the emotions that purify it, the truth that commands it, the spiritual forces that direct it, what else can we expect?

"Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life"; no greater injunction than that was ever given, and no more penetrative analysis ever offered of man's rise and progress or his decline and fall. Civilizations flourish or decay as the import and implications of that great saying are honoured or despised. Man is as his heart is, and as his heart is so the world will be.

Education.—What avails the education which leaves out of account the nature and quality of the inner life? I have been reading these last days the story of a great headmaster, Sanderson of Oundle. A mathematician of distinction, whose stress lay on the scientific side of education rather than the literary—although this last was by no means neglected—it was all the more surprising and delightful to find that what through all and above all this great-souled man was seeking was to awaken the spiritual life of his boys: the creative instinct, through the work-shops where during a portion of their time they made real things; the community instinct, which by a skilful arrangement of groups the whole educational method was devised to develop; everything indeed except the competitive instinct, which was *anathema*. The work was the thing; to do it well for its own sake, not to beat another boy. Sanderson held that parents should send their children to school not simply that they might learn lessons, either in languages or mathematics or science or art, but that they might gain life, the enthusiasm of life, the capacity and desire of giving

their own lives for the life of the world. His favourite text was: "I came that ye might have life, and that ye might have it more abundantly." And that is what a really good teacher does, he communicates, he awakens life, and for that, of course, he must himself have life. It is the soul that matters, and that which comes only from the soul: joy in living, in creating, in cultivating some bit of the garden of the world in which God has placed us, "to dress it and to keep it," as in the immortal story of Genesis. That we can do this and joy in doing it is to be educated, and nothing else is. Doing it as well as we can, and with a live sense of what it means and what hangs on the doing of it, that is education. And its fountain and motive is within. It cannot take its rise from outward things, least of all from the money-making spirit which is the foe of good work and good life and good brotherhood everywhere. Ye *cannot* serve God and Mammon. God looketh on the heart. It is out of a good heart and a good heart only that a renovated social and economic life can come. So Sanderson of Oundle believed, and so it is. The education which ignores that, ignores all that really matters.

So too with the child in family life. Make the spur of a child's ambition selfish—money, fame, power, *anything* but service, and you dwarf and cripple his soul, do a grievous wrong to him and to God and to the world. The family is the school of unselfishness, the first and the best. But unless its atmosphere is right there will be nothing doing;

nothing that is worth doing. A child learns by atmosphere, grows by it far more than by direct precept. Character communicates itself. You must inly be what you would have your child be. There also the Lord looketh on the heart.

Attention has been recently directed to three noble utterances. One was the King's message to the children on Empire Day; another was the Queen's. The third was delivered in the House of Commons by the man who is now Prime Minister.[1] The thing common to all three was that the qualities they desiderated were all qualities of the soul. The King spoke of the courage, wisdom and unselfishness by which all that was great in our Empire had been built and by which alone it could endure. The Queen spoke of those simple lessons of love, kindness and unselfishness which in cloud and sunshine are the strength and beauty of life. And when Mr Baldwin—in circumstances where language so direct and vital is, to say the least unusual—said, "There are four words of salvation for this country and for the whole world, and they are, Faith, Hope, Love, and Work," he uttered something which drew to him the hearts of all thinking people, and which will make men and women of goodwill in all parties watch his career with prayerful expectancy. Faith, hope, love and work are indeed the watchwords of the world's salvation, and it is out of the heart alone they can come to do their saving office.

But this must be added, that faith, hope, and

[1] Written before the fall of Mr Baldwin's Government.

work and love, to-day as ever, imply something beyond themselves. The souls out of which they are to grow need the quickening of some higher power. And that has always come and always will come through the channel of a deepened religious life. Not out of prudential motives will these four great words of salvation come to their Kingdom and rule the hearts of men. Not thus will they become flesh and dwell among us; be embodied in the life and movement of the actual, breathing everyday world.

When the Napoleonic Wars brought on our land economic hardship and deep distress, it was the spring-air of the great Evangelical Revival that breathed quickening and hope through the national life. And as it was so it will be. One of our teachers recently gave it as his considered opinion that religion is slowly moving from a centre in self to a centre in God. If that be true it is indeed good news. And signs are not wanting that the quest for material sensation is suffering from exhaustion, and that a hunger for higher things is stirring in the general soul. Witness the historic City churches in Smithfields and Wood Street and elsewhere crowded to overflowing during the luncheon hour in the midst of the weekday life of busy London, while Dean Inge, Sir Oliver Lodge and others speak of spiritual things. Is not all this prophetic, something of a sign and signal like that given once to David, on whose heart God looked, "The sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees"? God never quite

repeats Himself. The coming revival may not be like those that have been. New needs call for new remedies, and the divine resources are inexhaustible. Revival in these days must go deep, for it must spread wide, widely enough to cover all life. But its dynamic centre will not cease to be the heart. What we all need to-day is something to make us simple-minded, open to the truth, humble and contrite when we have done wrong, and passionately eager as David himself was for the restoration of God's presence and favour. May He who looks on the heart give us all the hearts He seeks ; the hearts through which alone He can do His holy errand and bring salvation to a sorely bewildered and distressful world.

II

THE ENVY OF THE ANGELS

JAMES BLACK, M.A.

"Which things the angels desire to look into."—1 PETER i. 12.

IN this passage the apostle is discussing the unique privilege of modern men, those of us who live under the blessings of Christ's day. He frankly considers these privileges astounding. Indeed, with a certain wistfulness, he wonders whether we really apprehend and appreciate the glory of our opportunities. In order to foster the growth of wonder in us, he relates here how the ancient prophets looked forward, with envy and longing, to our day of knowledge and privilege. What they would have given just to change places with us! How they longed to know the fulness of truth, which is now our Christian inheritance! But they died—tantalized souls—they died with their hungry eyes unsatisfied.

This is the same point which Christ made so forcibly: "Verily I say unto you, many prophets and righteous men have desired to see these things which ye see, and have not seen them: and to hear these things which ye hear, and have not heard them."

We are indeed the heirs of the ages, and their envy!

With this said, the apostle now adds the rather queer and quaint conceit, which underlies my text. To us, practical Anglo-Saxons, it may seem a daring flight of imagination. At least it has a touch of real poetry at its heart.

To see his idea, let me ask you to recall the background of some of Raphael's famous pictures.

Here, low down in the foreground, is a representation of the world of men, busy as a beehive and apparently as aimless, full as it always is of goodness and evil, light and shadow, living and dying, laughter and tears. But up at the top of the picture, leaning on some tumbled fleecy clouds, are little groups of chubby-faced angels, painted as only the Italian genius could paint them. These figures are looking down earnestly, strainingly, at the varied scene of the tumultuous world beneath them. Astonishment is printed on their clear eyes, but also a touch of gasping envy.

Now, this is the poetical idea lying beneath the apostle's sentence. Not only do the dead prophets envy us and our privileges! But even these Raphael angels, envoys of a purer race, look down with mingled curiosity and envy at the wonders of human life spread before their eyes—our great privileges, "which even the angels desire to look into."

In judging this flight of fancy, remember the apostle lived and worked in a circle of ideas very different from ours. In our hideous phrase, he

had a different "mentality." Hence this fanciful idea of angels, perched on clouds, and peering down at us with envy, may not be very convincing to the practical modern mind. But observe that he only employs this "conceit" in the by-going and for one clear purpose, to drive home to our thoughtless souls our immense privileges, to waken some of us to a growing astonishment, to shake us out of our placid acceptance of things, and to make us *gasp* just to think that all the ordinary privileges we now inherit are the source of angels' envy!

Now, if we take the apostle's quaint picture as it stands, what is it that these angels see in us to arouse their envy?

We can more easily imagine that their clear eyes, unfamiliar with sin, would see a thousand things in our life to stir their disgust and pity. Do we not speak in our common tongue of sights in the world that "would make the angels weep"? Here, around us and in us, is gaunt sin that blights our happiness like a plague. Here is sorrow, the fruit of cruelty, that is as common as death. Here is passion unbridled, that rings our world like a scarlet thread. And here are tragedies and hatreds and crimes that scorch our lives like licking flames. Oh! I could more easily picture these Raphael angels bursting their pure hearts with pity and anger! God knows there is enough tragedy in this little ant-heap of a world to make the angels weep.

What is it then, in this chequered life of ours, that might be the source of angels' envy?

I. Simply what we are, the very mystery and majesty of our complex human nature, the dreaming personal soul we have and are. In its heights and depths, in the sweep of its possibilities, our human nature may be the marvel of angels.

To see this, remember what the men of the apostle's day thought about these angels. We know that they regarded them as a race of untempted beings, creatures equally beyond passion and sin, created good, and with no bias of temperament or seduction or inherited taint against which they must struggle with unwinking vigilance; creatures who were simply the untroubled passionless messengers of God!

How different our tempted soul is from this! We often imagine that it would be a great boon if only we were like that. How we wish, especially when the tides of our soul run strongly, that we too were free from the dreadful agony of choice and debate! Some of our silly hymns—we have a few—rant about our being "like the angels," with the quiet untroubled life which we ascribe to them.

Well, any man who wants that type of goodness is welcome to it. As a moral thing, it isn't worth the snap of my fingers. If I am only good, like these fabled beings, just because I can't be otherwise: if I am only pure because I am untempted: if I only stand because I cannot fall: tell me of what moral value is my goodness? But here is the glory of human greatness, that having the power to fall, we yet choose to stand, and having

freedom to sin, we yet deliberately and with agony may choose God and goodness. That goodness, passionately chosen, is worlds above a goodness that cannot be otherwise. And it is this possible grandeur of the human soul, scarred with battle, that may be the angels' envy, for it is something greater than an untempted angel can possibly know.

Brethren, this is the apostle's doctrine—and it is the doctrine of Jesus—that you in all your frailty, are yet the biggest thing God ever dreamed. You have in you powers that are immeasurable—powers, I know, that may drag you to hell, but powers that may lift you to the feet of God. You may rise from the lowest until you become like God Himself. This makes the angels gasp! And here, as contrasted with these Raphael creatures, is the sheer glory of it—that angel is good because he can't be otherwise, but you do it by glorious choice, by the native powers that are in you, by agony and struggle, through good chosen and willed, by consent, until in Jesus you become like God Himself. This triumph of personal spirit is the biggest thing in the universe. The stars beside it are just heaps of dust! Well may the angels envy the wonder of a soul like yours.

II. These Raphael angels—and this is the particular application of the passage—envy the wonderful provision which God in His love has devised for us. They gaze amazed at Jesus, at the lonely cross, the "new life" which we draw from our Lord. "Which things the angels desire

to look into." But being untempted they know no sin, and being without sin, they know nothing of the joy of forgiveness and the pricelessness of One who redeems. And so they gaze with wondering eyes!

This, in the apostle's idea, stirs the curious envy of the angels when they begin to grasp its magnificent meaning. You will notice that it is only when the apostle mentions the great salvation offered us in Jesus that he adds our text about the angels' envy. He pictures them—remember it is only a picture, a flash of poetry—he pictures them peering down. They see a little hill outside Jerusalem. They see on the little hill a gaunt cross. They see on the cross the lonely figure of Jesus, the supreme proof of God's care for men. And when they grasp the wonder of what it means, in the passion of God, their eyes grow large with longing, that they, even they, might share such a token of the pity and grace of God.

The point here is: These untempted and unsinning beings can never know the wonder of God as we do, for they can never know His heart of grace! We have seen into God's heart, as they never can: we have seen reaches of His soul, hidden from all those who do not need forgiveness. The God of Jesus—Jesus who suffered for us—is something thereby to us what He can never be to any race or class of creatures who need no salvation.

"Which of them," cried Jesus, "will love him most?" Simon answered and said, "I suppose that he to whom he forgave most." That is it!

There is a certain truth in the idea that we who are sinners can know the heart of God better than any untempted saint. It is only a broken and repentant sinner who can know the ecstasy of forgiveness and reinstatement. It is only the wanderer, lost in the mists of the hills, who can experience the happiness of home-coming. It is only the man who is faint with hunger who can appreciate the joy of food. This is the apostle's argument—that God has revealed Himself to us in special and wonderful ways, and these ways are the angels' envy. For the secret of God's heart and character, surely, is His pity: not His law, nor His justice, nor His purity: but His gracious forgiveness, His abounding love, and His inexplicable grace. These, to the apostle, are fully summarized in Jesus. We alone, broken human beings, know the joy of being redeemed. "Which things, in their beautiful mystery, the angels desire to look into."

This, then, is what fastens the angels' big eyes. Think of it for a moment, though to your modern mind the whole picture seems *outré*. *They* see what it means. Do we? *They* appreciate the wonder of such love. Do we? They almost envy your sin, that they might experience such forgiveness and grace. Brethren, when you value God's love like that, you will fall on your knees and worship.

Instead, what happens? Why! some of us have heard of God's goodness so often, since childhood's droning days, that we treat it like an

old song. We can gaze at Jesus with unamazed eyes. We are even perilously familiar with the cross. The whole pity and grace of God have become cheap to us. The love of the Father has become an ordinary and "accepted" thing, like the easy forgiveness of men. And because we see so little in it, we get so little out of it.

I take the picture to-day, from the apostle's dreamy heart, just that some of us may be shocked —shocked into wonder. There can be no worship without wonder. There can be no big religion that hasn't got a big God. May I ask you for a moment to look at Jesus through these angels' eyes, and see the wonders which they envy you. Would God I could shake you out of the complacent way in which you take everything here for granted—even that cross!

III. Most of all, the angels envy us the glory to which Jesus can raise us. They envy us our possibilities, our future in God. We have something to attain to that they can never rival.

These are fine beings, I admit, brethren—these clear-eyed Raphael angels. But we in Jesus may become finer than they. In the provision of God, through Jesus, we may touch heights unguessed by them. Look at this one here a moment: I admire him. He is good, it is true; but he is good simply because, in his untempted soul, he cannot plan evil. Can he sin? I can. Can he be torn in agony? I can. Can he know the astonishing puzzle of good and evil, of good and the lower good? I can. But one day I, even I, shall beat

him. For which is the greater good—the good he has by temperament, that is no moral credit of his own, or the good that I may will and choose through a hundred perplexities ? He is in Heaven, I know—that Raphael angel. But he was created there : what credit is it of his ? I, by agony in Christ, shall one day climb to Heaven, though all the devils of my own nature hold me back. He had no choice. I—I might have chosen lust and hell ! Keep your tidy little Heaven, you chubby-cheeked angel : keep your untempted soul : and keep your saintly calm. We sinning souls shall exult in our human nature, with its passions and its glories. But wait, thou thing with the child's eyes. One day, in Jesus Christ, after falls and stains and broken faiths, by His salvation, through victory in Him, we shall climb where you are, and do what you never can do—" take the Kingdom of Heaven by violence." By the grace of Jesus we shall !

Now, I have chosen this subject to-day to open up to you the glories of your own soul. If we give our Lord His chance with us, He will bring us to " perfection's sacred heights." Give Him His chance.

III

MISSING THE HIGHEST

W. M. Clow, D.D.

"Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."—Matt. xi. 11.

John the Baptist was the only one of His contemporaries who impressed Jesus. He never mentioned his name without a tribute of honour. He called him a burning and a shining light, in whose message, for a season, men rejoiced. Here He draws a portrait of John, and it is the only full-length portrait Jesus ever drew. John had sent his disciples with that question of a perplexed and downcast man, "Art thou He that should come, or do we look for another?" It was a cry out of the prison where John lay, saddened by disappointment, haunted by doubts, awaiting his doom. Jesus sent back His message of good tidings. Then He turned to the multitudes and spoke to them of John. They had known John's life and had been drawn to him by his passion for righteousness. They had been fascinated by his self-denial, inspired by his courage, aroused by his call to repentance. They had mused in

their hearts as to whether he might be the Messiah for whose coming every Jewish heart longed. Now, they were not sure where to place him in the succession of the witnesses for God. Jesus draws this portrait, which is a criticism as well as an appreciation, an estimate as well as a revelation, in touch after touch of insight, and He sums it up in His declaration, "Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist."

1

Every portrait is painted from a different point of view. The point of view here is the comparative greatness of men. There are many kinds of greatness recognised and approved. There is the greatness of genius, of the man with ten talents—with clear and spacious mind, and swift and discerning wisdom. That is the greatness of the scholar, the thinker, and the poet. There is the greatness of the man whose skill and knowledge, inventiveness and resource, have made him a leader in the enterprises of his time. There is the greatness of a master of affairs, such as makes a man a great servant of the State, or the captain of the great forces of his age. To such greatnesses Jesus gave no pre-eminence. The one and only greatness He honoured was the moral splendour, the spiritual power, of the unfaltering vision of the unseen and the eternal. It was the greatness of those who have served God. When we look

with cleansed eyes we see as Jesus saw. We praise those who loved their country, and died for it, whose names live for evermore. We remember those who served their generation, caring for its poor, facing its tides of sin and sorrow, calling its lost and castaway to the fellowship of God. The only names which shall never be forgotten are those who have given themselves to, and made their sacrifice for, that kingdom of heaven which Jesus lived and died to found.

On that roll of the spiritually great Jesus sets the name of John the Baptist. By his fearless witness he had roused Judea and Jerusalem from their apathy. By the passion of his appeal to their consciences he had quickened multitudes to repentance. He had pierced even the Scribe and the Pharisee to the quick, and they also were found among the crowds that went out into the wilderness, and renewed their faith at the Jordan. He had evoked the devotion of a band of young men, whose hearts the Lord had touched. From their ranks Jesus had drawn His first disciples. John had lived out a life of incorruptible purity, and had not been seduced either by popular applause or by the favour of men of power. Jesus sets His seal on John's moral pre-eminence in the sentence, that every listener approved, when He said, "Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist."

2

This estimate may seem at first sight to be more than is warranted. We think of those who were God's witnesses in times gone by, and are tempted to wonder at the high place given to John. We think of Abraham and his daring faith; Moses and his austere righteousness; Samuel and his vision of God; David, the man after God's own heart, who led the people as a shepherd leads his flock. Then we recall Elijah in his lonely witness on Carmel; Amos with his glowing fervour for righteousness; Hosea with his pathetic appeal; Isaiah with his seraphic fire; and we wonder if John the Baptist should be placed in that great succession.

Let us mark the strokes by which Jesus makes John's moral greatness stand out in convincing appeal. "What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?" Here is the man who never feared what man could do to him, never faltered in the hour of trial, never fell in any base temptation. Think of Abraham playing the coward in Egypt, of Moses breaking the tables of the law in his fierce anger, of Samuel repeating Eli's sin in not restraining his sons, of David—no, we shall not speak, we need not speak of that tender heart, that noble spirit, yet so frail and so passionate a soul.

Think of the prophets, who did not always remember the mercy of God in their message of judgment, and too often looked out with ashen

faces and trembling words, upon the crowds who rejected their message with scorn. What were they all? They were reeds—shaken by the wind. We must place them with that great number, throughout all generations, to whom we give a place of honour in our record, and yet cannot forget the dark passage of their lives, the slip and fall of their youth, the hour of their open denial. By some frailty of will, or lack of control of temper, or by yielding to some besetting sin, how many who have named the great name, have shown themselves to be reeds shaken by the wind. As they rise in our recollection, we see John the Baptist as Jesus drew him, fearless, undaunted, unstained, wearing the white flower of a blameless life.

Jesus continues, "But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment?" Our Lord is touching here a subtler and stronger temptation than the tumult of an angry crowd, or the assault of an inward passion. Many a man, who has set his face steadfastly in a day of trial, has been seduced by the delight of a life of ease, or by the insidious appeal of popularity. There is one subtle seduction which few men have withstood. That is the appeal of the life of a court, and all its silken refinement. Its atmosphere has sapped the moral vigour and weakened the will. When Jesus speaks here of "soft clothing," and "king's houses," He is thinking of Herod's palace and Herod's favour, and is remembering John's protest against Herod's sin. John might have been pardoned if, like many another priest and

minister at the king's table, he had palliated Herod's wrong-doing, or at least had been silent in regard to the passion of the queen. But his cry rang out, "It is not lawful for thee to have her." No braver word was ever spoken by human lips. It was John's rebuke to a man who held his life in the hollow of his hand. It was a word of condemnation upon a woman whose seared conscience passed no judgment on her life of shame. As we realize how few in all ages have had the courage to bear this undaunted witness to purity, we begin to understand the pre-eminent moral witness of John.

"But what went ye out for to see?" Christ asks again. "A prophet?" Yes, a prophet! Jesus is bidding those who listen to Him look back to that time when John left behind him the ease and comfort of the temple chambers in Jerusalem, and the honour of being a priest in God's house, to pass out to the wilderness, and to undertake the high calling of a prophet. He recalled John standing, inspired by the prophet's insight, burdened by the prophet's message, urgent with the prophet's passion. Then He adds another line to the picture as He affirms, "Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet." What is it to be more than a prophet? A prophet is a messenger of God, a seer with a vision of an eternal truth, who comes to call men to a nobler faith and a more impassioned righteousness. Yet at the highest the prophet is only a voice crying in the wilderness. He is only a pilgrim in the night, and at the best a herald of the dawn. His

message never goes beyond the proclamation that "the morning cometh." John had more than a vision to reveal and a truth to declare. He saw the dayspring from on high visiting the earth. He saw what a prophet never saw, when he saw the face of Jesus and beheld Him as He walked by the way, and he could cry, as no prophet ever cried, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." "Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist."

3

But now Jesus casts a shadow on the portrait. "Notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." There is a greatness to which John did not attain. That greatness belongs even to the least in the kingdom of heaven. What is it to be in the kingdom? It is not only to see Christ, and to bear witness to Him, and to call men to repent and make ready for His coming. It is not only to walk on a high level of truth and purity and courage. To be in the kingdom is to enter in by a strait gate into a narrow way, to pass into the fold by the door kept by One who knows His own sheep by name, and calls them to follow Him. It is to become a little child, with a child's trust and simplicity and submission. It is to take up the yoke of meekness and lowliness, and rest in a simple contentment. It is to deny oneself and take up one's cross after Christ. It is to sit

with Jesus in the Upper Room and eat and drink with Him. Did John enter into the kingdom? Mark him standing in the wilderness, after Jesus had been seen, continuing his austere life, uttering his loyal witness to righteousness, warning men of the judgment to come. See him gathering his disciples about him, and still teaching his own stern and unyielding code of conduct. What is John the Baptist? He is a Hebrew of the Hebrews. He is a master of the old covenant. He has not entered into that new life and that new service, that new liberty and that new joy, to be found in Christ. Come to the supper-room of Simon the Pharisee. He had invited Jesus to be his guest on the evening of a Sabbath day. But in an act of discourtesy he did not give Jesus the guest's kiss of welcome, or the guest's water to wash His feet. Mark the woman who enters in through the open door. She is "a sinner in the city." She passes to where Jesus reclines, and kneels behind Him that she may anoint His feet. But as she kneels, the thought of what Jesus has been to her, and has done for her, arises within her mind, and a great tide of adoring gratitude and responsive love sweeps through her heart, until her tears fall upon her Redeemer's feet. She unbinds her hair—the glory of her womanhood—that she may dry the feet on which her tears had fallen. What is she? She is the least in the kingdom of heaven. But she has a knowledge, a faith, a penitence, a devotion, a passion of love for Jesus, which John never knew.

She is the least in the kingdom of heaven, but she is greater than John the Baptist.

4

Where did John fail? He stood beside the gate, but he did not enter in. He pointed out the Lamb of God to men, but he did not seek to follow Him. He saw Christ gathering His disciples, but he did not become one of the company. He was the last prophet of the Old Testament when he should have been the first evangelist of the New. He continued by the altar of Israel when he might have stood under the cross. God is not unrighteous to forget his work and labour of love. His reward is on high. He has passed to the inheritance of the just. But he did not enter into the kingdom of heaven at the call of Christ. Mark that revealing word of Jesus, "Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me." John stumbled at Jesus. He stumbled at Christ's ways. He stumbled at Christ's deeds. He stumbled at Christ's claims. He stumbled at Christ's meekness and lowliness and humility and patience. That is the meaning of the cry out of the prison, "Art thou He that should come, or do we look for another?"

A very different story might have been told. Let me read you this Scripture. "And behold, when the morning was come, Andrew and John went forth and sought John the Baptist, and said unto him, 'We have found the Messiah.' They

told him of the wondrous things that Jesus had spoken, how He had opened the Scriptures, and made their hearts burn within them as He talked with them, while they abode with Him that night. Then said John the Baptist, 'I also will go and see Jesus.' And when he came to Jesus, and heard the message of the kingdom, and of the Father's love and desire, he bowed himself down with the cry, 'Blessed are my eyes for they have seen what many prophets and righteous men have desired to see, and not seen.' And from that time he followed Jesus and was numbered with His disciples." Where is that Scripture to be found? There is no such Scripture, but there might have been, and there should have been. "He must increase, but I must decrease." That is John's tribute, but it is a tribute with a sigh. It is the word of one who continued to gather disciples around himself when he ought to have been enrolled in the number of the disciples of his Lord. "The least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

How shall we describe this spiritual failure? *It is the missing of the highest.* A great company stand with John the Baptist, who have missed the highest. There are men and women of noble learning, spacious mind, clean and scrupulous lives, a fine sense of honour, and consciences quick to protest against wrong. But they lack one thing, for they have never risen to the high vocation and the noble service of a disciple of Christ. They have missed the highest. They are not in the kingdom. There are others who have set their

faces to seek truth and purity and have cherished high ideals through many years. But in that day when the appeal came to yield themselves and their lives to the obedience of Christ, to humble themselves that they might sit at His feet, to make some sacrifice which would have turned their faces toward a costly and difficult service, they made the great refusal. They missed the highest. They did not enter into the kingdom. There are others who are still in the years which are impressionable and tender, who have been trained in all the habits of a reverent faith, who have been entreated to make the complete surrender which alters the whole course of life, but they hesitate, and they allow the days to pass and, too often, although there may be no record of shame, they miss the highest. They do not enter into the kingdom. Of all these Christ has to speak with sorrow—" The least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than they."

Here is some young soul, simple and unlessoned, glowing with a love and loyalty to Christ. Here is some lowly, humble-placed woman who has seen Christ's moral loveliness and known the power of His name. Here is a penitent and ashamed man who can do no other than cling to Christ's cross and rejoice in the forgiveness of his sins. These reach the highest, and they are greater than those who stand in the strength of a high and serious righteousness, and much greater than those who achieve a career that wins the world's applause. Of such is the kingdom of heaven.

One of the most moving books written in connection with the great European War is that entitled, *A Young Soldier of France.* He was a student of divinity in the Huguenot College at Montauban. When the war broke out he made a willing response to the summons. Before he was twenty years of age he had made the supreme sacrifice. Listen to a sentence or two from one of his letters. "The Master's call is always ringing in my ears, or rather in my heart. If I must fall I am ready. I shall die without regret, because I know that others will carry on, better than I could do, the work to which I have given myself; and because I have inward assurance of having found the Way, and that the Master will recognize me in the end." That is the speech and the accent of those who have attained the highest. They are among the blessed who have not been offended in Christ.

IV

THE DUTY OF JOY IN THE LORD

R. J. Drummond, D.D.

"We joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ."
—Romans v. 11.

Christianity is essentially joyous. There is something wrong with the Christian who is habitually sombre and austere. A Christian should naturally, persistently and deliberately look at the bright side of things, court the sunshine, reassure himself with thoughts of the clouds' silver lining and the day when the clouds will break, the sun shine through, and the shadows flee away. He will make the best of the most unpromising situation, find good in everything. "Be glad in the Lord and rejoice" is his motto. And this, the joy of the religious man, is the subject on which I wish to dwell with you this morning.

I. Now this joy begins in the joy of forgiveness.

There is a part of the service in the Book of Common Prayer, very near the beginning, which paves the way for all the rest. It is the Confession and Absolution—the united Common Confession of Sin—"We have erred from Thy ways like

lost sheep, we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against Thy holy laws, we have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done; and there is no health in us"; and the Absolution—"He pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent, and unfeignedly believe His Holy Gospel." That is gloriously true. No thinking man ever objected to that part of the Liturgy, except for the one cause, namely this, that only the minister is allowed to pronounce the Absolution. In reality it is the blessed assurance that any believer can give to any anxious, sin-burdened, penitent soul. And "Oh the blessedness of the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose iniquity is covered, and to whom the Lord doth not impute his sin, in whose spirit there is no guile." That is the beginning of Christian joy. It is the joy of the ransomed—the liberated captive, the prisoner released from the debtor's prison. It is the feeling which is struggling for expression all through the beginning of this fifth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. Paul has brought his readers to see that if they believe in Jesus Christ they are set right with God—justified by that faith. So there is no cause for timid misgivings as to God's attitude. There may be tribulations; but a Christian, rid of his burden, will meet them with a light heart. The thought of God that was once a source of uneasiness, dread, and even dismay, has become

rich in comfort, courage, and confidence, a pleasure, a gladness, and a joy. Christ's Atonement has done this. "We joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Paul saw that. Paul did that. Brethren, do *we*? *Do* we? Are we glad that we are forgiven? If not, were we ever sad that we were not forgiven? If not, are we truly penitent? Have we a right to be glad? Can we be glad in the Lord—nay, glad at all,—if we are yet in our sins, and under the wrath and curse of God?

II. This joy of the religious is the joy of surrender, sacrifice, renunciation—call it which you will.

Surrender, sacrifice, renunciation: they are none of them words which on the face of them suggest what is pleasant to the natural man. There is a joy in giving: I am not so sure that we so often think that it is a joy to give up. But the Christian, who has fully entered into this secret of joy, knows how real it is. It is two-fold. For one thing, what a Christian gives up for Christ is the small return he can make for the great sacrifice the Saviour made for him. It does not matter what it is he gives up. The sacrifice may be great or little. It may be a career, honourable in its kind, or a business of the most remunerative character, set aside for the sake of doing direct work in Home or Foreign Mission Field. It may be the sweets of home or favourite pursuits and studies. It may be engrossing sports or amusements. It may be the object of the heart's tenderest affections, but in whom there is found to be no love for Christ or His Cause. Great or small, the

sacrifice is real; the pain is acute; but the joy is genuine. We have suffered something for Him Whose sufferings for us we can never repay. Love has had its opportunity and rejoices.

But there is another element in the joy of surrender. We have all an idea that it is a splendid thing to be our own masters, to shape our own careers, to go our own ways, to do as we like. We often change our minds about that when we begin to feel the burden of the responsibility which it entails. Ah, free will—to be our own masters—is a dazzling position, but it is on a giddy eminence; and no serious, humble-minded man fails to feel at times overwhelmed with the duty of choosing aright, of determining the path of service, of work, of conduct, which he ought to follow. He becomes terribly conscious of his own limitations, of the limits of his knowledge and ability. He decides for himself and directs others, and is immediately filled with misgivings. "Oh for someone," he cries, "to take the responsibility. I am ready to go anywhere, do anything, endure anything, if only someone on whom I can absolutely depend will take the responsibility and give me my orders." And here is Christ: and he surrenders to Him. He casts his burden on the Lord, weary and heavy-laden with the burden of directing his own life, and making a poor job of it at that. He accepts Christ's invitation, takes His yoke which is easy, His burden which is light, and finds rest to his soul. And once more the joy of surrender, surrender to Christ as Master,

to be His servant and simply be guided by His Word and do His will, is the joy of relief. He discovers what is true liberty. His service is perfect freedom.

III. Then, again, isn't the Christian's joy the joy of work ?

Children are not the only people that are fond of a holiday. We all like a day off. We talk about our holidays, and as soon as one spell of holiday is over, begin to plan for the next. One might almost think, to hear us talk, that we lived for them. But is that true ? "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." But all play and no work makes Jack—what ? A nuisance to everybody that knows him, and a burden to himself. No, a man is happiest—there is a ring in his voice, a spring in his step, and a sparkle in his eye—when he is engaged in congenial work and is busiest at it.

Now this is the Christian's joy. It is the joy of work—congenial work that demands all our powers. It is sure to be congenial, because its variety is so great that every man, woman, and child can select just what he prefers, and what he is best suited for. For thousands it is simply their daily toil, but it is this approached in a new spirit. It has ceased to be merely a means of earning food, clothes, and shelter. It has become a medium through which a man can reveal what he really is, reveal the spirit of Christ that is in him. How ? Is it a workman ? By the conscientiousness and care and finish with which he does his work, by the

obvious pride he has in it. His fellow-worker, his employer, sees this, seeks out the secret, and discovers that in him there is one who is working, not with eye-service as a man-pleaser: but he thinks of his work as something which in the last resort he is doing for God. Or it's an employer. But he has ceased to think of his business principally as a means of bringing gold to his coffers. He is thinking of it as a grand enterprise to make the most of some of the gifts which God has stored in the earth, to put them at the service of his fellow-men, to afford remunerative employment under fair, healthy conditions to those he employs, and, from the returns it brings him, to enable him to relieve the needy and promote the interests of the cause of Christ. What joy it is, what a delight, to tackle work in this spirit! It redeems work from the mire of materialism, the blight of secularism, makes it a holy thing, a calling from God, a service of Christ.

But the joy of work gives a still keener zest to the Christian when the work is directly for the advancement of the kingdom of the Redeemer. It may be the work to which a man devotes his leisure hours, work as an elder, say, in a share of the oversight of a congregation, or work devoted to the management of its temporal affairs, work for the ingathering of funds and for their judicious expenditure. It may be work in choir or in the Sabbath school. It may be in direct personal contact by visitation or club life with those indifferent to things religious, or specially exposed

to influences hostile to a godly life. It may be care for the sick, the sad, the poverty stricken or the bereaved. But men and women who give themselves to this, share in the travail of the soul of the Saviour, and are satisfied. They see the pleasure of the Lord prospering in their hand, and work seems a glorious privilege, the most inspiring of all recreations. Though they may be left fatigued in body by it, they are refreshed in spirit, and will go on their way rejoicing.

Again, this may be a man's life-calling in the Church at Home or in the Mission Field. Then how rich in inspiration is every side of his work. Is it the study of God's Word, that he may exhibit its message to others? He grudges every hour that draws him from it; while every book he reads, every person he meets, every experience through which he passes, every event that transpires, is put under contribution to illuminate the theme. Is it the presentation of the faith in public worship or Bible Class, or where you will? He hails the opportunity; for it enables him to tell the glory of his Saviour, the worth of His salvation, and point the way of life to men groping in darkness and in the shadow of death. Is it the visitation of his people in health or sickness, to join with them when the marriage bells ring, or condole with them when the death-bell tolls? Again his heart is glad, for these afford openings when heart opens to heart and soul communes with soul, and he has his opportunity to speak a word in season to him that is weary and ready to faint, to remon-

strate with the refractory, counsel the inexperienced, reassure the doubting and hear the first confessions of faith in an accepted Lord. Talk not to him of weariness; he waives it aside in the joy of his work. He says with the Apostle, and takes for his motto, "I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls."

You see, the Christian's joy in work is the joy of service. And who would not count it all joy to serve such a Master as Jesus Christ our Lord? The soldier or sailor counts it an honour to serve under a distinguished commander no matter how exacting his commands, how strict his discipline may be. The lad counts it a benefit to get work with a good firm, even though it means longer hours and sharper scrutiny. But to serve the Lord Christ, so gracious, so considerate! Look at Him! Girt with a towel, doing menial service, washing His disciples' feet! We once heard Him in a parable, in order to suggest the delight of a master at finding trusty servants all on the alert for his coming, though it be at the dead of night, saying, that if he found them so, he would gird himself and bid them sit down to meat and himself serve them. And as we listened we said, "That is exaggeration, that is hyperbole—he would never do that!" But here we see Him at that very task. No wonder a simple, healthy soul like Peter will scarcely accept such service, feels it too much honour for him, too great self-abasement for his Lord; and when at last he is persuaded, it is for such a Master he says, "I will

lay down my life for Thy sake." It is the keenest joy to serve such a Master, such a Lord.

IV. Once more the joy of the Christian is the joy of worship.

I wonder how many of you agree with what was said to me by one of our members the other day. She said, "When I come to church I don't want to sing any of those doleful psalms or hymns. I want to sing bright glad psalms and hymns of praise." She feels "like singing all the time." Now don't you shake your heads and say, "That must be a very inexperienced young thing, who has known very little of earth's sorrows and cares." You are quite mistaken. She has been through bereavement in most trying circumstances, and faces tragedy at home every day. But in the hour of worship the clouds roll back and she knows its joy.

Now what is the joy of worship? First of all there is a natural side to it. There is something soothing to the nerves in the quiet of a place of worship. Even to be there alone is to leave the world with its rush and noise behind, and feel that there is much in life for which there is no need to strive to outstrip one's neighbours, but which will simply flow into the soul that will be still and wait to receive it. And when others gather in the sanctuary, and voices rise unitedly in praise to God, or in pleading entreaty, is there not a great sense of fellowship, something that speaks of what men may attain, if they work together for a common end; not thrust each other aside, each

seeking but to serve himself? Common praise, common prayer, common message, obliterate the obnoxious divisions and distinctions of earth and call men to the one great family of God; and brotherhood in Christ supersedes every other relation.

Besides, worship points to the ideal, counteracts the cleaving of our souls to the dust, and draws us up. Our actual is so inferior to our possible of work and service. We are so prone to sink to the hum-drum and mediocre, to be content with something less than the best, in work for Christ, in the service of God. But in worship our imagination is stirred. In the hour of worship we stand with Isaiah in the Temple. We see "the Lord seated upon a throne high and lifted up," and His train fills the Temple: the posts of the door are shaken: cherubim and seraphim veil their faces before Him, while they cry, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God of Hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory." And as this vision of heaven and its holy mysteries floats before our eyes, we are carried out of ourselves: we are painfully reminded, like Isaiah, how unfit we are to serve God as He should be served, but the desire grows for fitness: and if only He will take us, fit us, and use us, then no task will daunt us, no demand seem more than meet. And it is joy, holy joy, to find the conviction stealing into our souls, that God is responding to our yearnings and meeting our deep desires.

Yes, that is the deepest joy of worship, be it

in the house of God or in the quiet of our own rooms. It is the thrill of holy emotion in the thought that God is near. We are in touch with Him. His ear is listening to our voice. His Spirit is speaking to our soul. Thus to be in touch with the Eternal, in tune with the Infinite, is what one is tempted to call a rare privilege. But to say "rare" is to suggest that it is within the reach of but a favoured few, and even for them only once in a while. And that is not true. It may be yours, it may be mine, whenever we enter this church; whenever we gather our families around us to sing God's praise, to read His word, to lift our hearts in prayer; whenever at early morn or as the day closes we turn our thoughts inward and upward, meditate on God's presence, commune with Him in prayer.

Oh, my brethren, do we cultivate this spirit of holy joy? Does our union with Christ bring gladness into our lives? Does it enable us to face the darkest phases of earthly life with a buoyant spirit that will not sink beneath the waves of despair? It should. If it does not, we have somehow missed the encouragement in Christ's farewell, "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but, be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." Let us, therefore, joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

V

THE ALMONERS OF GOD

W. W. Gauld, M.A.

"Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee."—Acts iii. 6.

There is no need to exercise our ingenuity to find a modern parallel to this striking scene at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple at Jerusalem. The lame man is always with us, an abiding challenge to the Christian conscience. We pass him on our way to Church every Sunday. He is not, perhaps, literally sitting on the steps of the sanctuary; but he is there all the same for those who have eyes to see him.

Here, right at the outset, is the first lesson the story is meant to teach us, that we must use our eyes and face the facts of the situation. It is amazing how blind we can be to what is unpleasant or disquieting. It is not only the horses that go through our streets in blinkers. Shame and need stare us in the face every day, and we resolutely refuse to look at them. In part, it may be due to familiarity. The inner eye, like the outer, has a wonderful power of accommodation. We only really see what we want to see. One day I watched

an artist friend at work in the Pass of Leny. As I looked on that scene of indescribable beauty and majesty—the confusion of myriad-leaved trees amid a tangle of bracken and wild flowers, the foaming cataract laughing defiance to the jagged rocks in mid-stream, and in the background the huge bulk of Ben Ledi—I wondered at the skill which was able to put it upon canvas. I asked my friend the secret of his craft, and he told me in a single sentence: "You must eliminate the unessential." That is a faculty we all exercise more or less unconsciously. The test of our character is—What do we consider essential? What picture of life do we see with the eye of our imagination? *Is the lame man in it?*

I suppose there were hundreds entered the Temple that day and never saw the cripple at all: he was too familiar an object there to attract attention. Some few, perhaps, flung him a contemptuous copper—caught him, so to speak, with the tail of their eye—and forgot him the next instant. To one or two his presence may have been a positive offence: they saw him "in the small cracked mirror of their mind" with the blurred and distorted vision of prejudice as a mere blot upon the landscape; and they were the blindest of all. "And Peter, fastening his eyes on him with John, said, Look on us."

That is the Christian attitude to the lame man. It recognizes his existence. It acknowledges his right to be heard and helped. Peter and John were going into the Temple; for they were devout

men and loved the House of God: but they had been with Jesus of late and learned something of His mind and habits. His ear was never deaf to a cry for help, whatever His preoccupations. He had ever an eye for the lame man. So Peter and John stopped to look—and look again. It was precisely what Jesus would have done; and we who call Him Lord must have in us the mind that was in Him, and cultivate the habit of using our eyes. It is not enough to give a passing glance at the social misery around us or heave a sympathetic sigh over some peculiarly pathetic incident. However others take it, it must be a poignant and personal concern to us. The friends of the lame man, whether they fully realized it or not, were utterly right in laying him at the door of the Church. That is his proper place; and the people who go to Church cannot disclaim responsibility. What, indeed, do we go to Church for? To worship God! Yes! to worship a God Who said, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice." Of what avail can our prayers be with God here, if we have hardened our hearts against the prayer of the lame man outside the door yonder? For herein is that word of the Master fulfilled: "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there the gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."

This, then, to begin with, that the Church must be prepared to recognize the lame man. She must

have vision to see and own his need. But more than vision is required: she must have courage as well. The apostles not only fastened their eyes on the cripple. They did something much more remarkable than that. They commanded him to fasten his eyes upon them. "Look on us," said Peter with the daring of a great faith. He not only had the will to help, but was conscious of the power to help. And that is where the Church so often fails. Her critics are in most cases wide of the mark when they charge her with sheer heartlessness and unconcern. With all their faults the followers of Christ have not been altogether lacking in charity. You will find, I believe, more sympathy with the needy and more genuine concern for their welfare within the Church than without it. The real weakness of the Church lies elsewhere. Jesus exposed it with unmistakable clearness, when His disciples asked Him why they were powerless to heal the epileptic at the foot of the Mount of Transfiguration. It was because of their want of faith. That verdict stands. We meet our lame man and our heart goes out to him. We would give him a hand, if we believed it would do him any good. But we are not conscious of any saving power within us. We shrink from raising false hopes in him. And so we hurry past him, not in callousness but in cowardice. We simply dare not challenge him in the word of the apostle: "Look on us."

Here is the open secret of our tragic inefficiency as Christian men and women. We need more of

Peter's godly daring. Let us give it its true name—faith; for what is faith but simply courage raised to its highest power? And it does take courage to face your lame man and bid him trust you. For one thing, you run a grave risk of being misunderstood. He may ask or expect from you what you cannot give him; and sometimes in his chagrin he will curse you for your pains. But at all events you will have roused him from despair or bitterness. Your mere interest in him will at least assure him that somebody cares, that there are in this low-browed world resources of human compassion and kindness which are at his disposal if he cares to have them. You have already done something—often far more than you think—when you have lit a gleam of hope in some lonely, darkened heart.

But this brings us sharply up against the crucial question: What have we to give the lame man? Have we anything at all to give him? In what sense can you and I reply with the apostle, "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee"?

I. In the first place, *you must give what you have.*

If you *have* silver and gold, then you must give that. You have no right to quote Peter in excuse for your lack of generosity. Remember that noble word of the Arabs: "He that hath bread is debtor to him that hath none." Beware of that blessed phrase "indiscriminate charity." It covers a multitude of sins—meanness and greed

and hardness of heart. Sheridan in his *School for Scandal* has pilloried that contemptible type in Joseph Surface. "A man of the most benevolent way of thinking," says Sir Oliver with biting sarcasm; and Rowley replies: "As to his way of thinking, I cannot pretend to judge; for, to do him justice, he appears to have as much speculative benevolence as any private gentleman in the kingdom, though he is seldom so sensual as to indulge himself in the exercise of it."

Watch and pray against this sin of "speculative benevolence." It is far more common than you would imagine. It is a peculiar temptation to us who sing and pray and preach and hear sermons about the love of God and the Brotherhood of men. It is a big part of the opposition in some hearts to the political activities of the Church. They profess a pious concern for the spirituality of the House of God and the sanctity of the pulpit: they are really alarmed at the practical consequences of applied Christianity. It is still a more potent factor in creating those selfish, close-fisted, money-grabbing Christians who bring discredit upon the fair name of Christ amongst them that are without. "Money talks!" says the world. It is the only language many people understand; and of the meaning of one text they are absolutely sure: "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon."

Lord Kelvin used to declare that he had never really grasped a scientific principle in mathematics until he was able to make a model of it. Depend upon it, you have not grasped the meaning of

Christian charity until you have put it into practice. Nowhere is it more necessary to be concrete, detailed, personal; for nowhere is it easier to delude ourselves with misty fancies and a vague emotional religiosity. As George Eliot reminds us with her profound insight into the workings of the human heart: "There is no general doctrine which is not capable of eating out our morality, if unchecked by a deep-seated habit of direct fellow-feeling with individual fellow-men." You must bring your "speculative benevolence" to the touchstone of reality. It is not enough to pity the lame man. If you have money in your pocket, you must pay him that which is due. You must give what you have.

II. In the second place, *you can only give what you have.*

That statement is not quite so innocent as it looks! The problem of the lame man is not primarily a financial one. It goes much deeper than that. Even a full purse in generous hands cannot solve it. It were a criminal folly to belittle the power of money in the service of philanthropy. But it is a still grosser foolishness to imagine that the poor want nothing but "things to eat." It is written not merely in Scripture but in human nature, "Man shall not live by bread alone"; and it is they who feed the hungry hearts of men who are the truest philanthropists and will be held in grateful remembrance when more practical well-doers are buried deep in oblivion. That is just the boast of the poet:

"The sleep-flower sways in the wheat its head,
Heavy with dreams, as that with bread:
The goodly grain and the sun-flushed sleeper
The reaper reaps, and Time the reaper.

I hang 'mid men my needless head,
And my fruit is dreams as theirs is bread:
The goodly men and the sun-hazed sleeper
Time shall reap; and after the reaper
The world shall glean of me, me the sleeper."

It is the still juster boast of the apostle, who with a proud humility owned himself "a pauper," yet claimed to be "the means of wealth to many, without a penny but possessed of all." And in precisely the same spirit Peter faced the paralytic and answered his appeal. He had no silver or gold, but he did have something to give: "Such as I have give I thee." There was no shame in his confession of poverty: there was no false modesty in his claim to power. The Chief of the Apostles was never a humbler or a greater man than when he spoke to the lame man at the Temple gate. He made his boast that day in his Lord. He had no money in his purse, but he had that in his gift which no wealth could buy or bestow. In the presence of the beggar's need he knew himself the almoner of God, and out of a full heart he bore his testimony: "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk."

Do not miss the significance of this by saying that you could not perform the miracle of healing Peter wrought. It was not Peter who wrought

the miracle: it was God. All Peter had was faith, based on a personal experience of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. And that is within the reach of us all. The question for you and me is not, Will God use us as He used the apostle? but, Have you and I a witness to bear as real and convincing as the apostle's? Have we the right to speak in the name of Christ? It is passing easy, as we have seen, to quote the words of Peter as the purest cant; but to quote them in sincerity and truth is an acid test of the reality of our religious life. Despite the cheap sneers of the world, it is in plain fact far easier to give a shilling to a beggar in his want than to speak a word in season to him in his weariness. If ever you have tried it, you will acknowledge that with a great humility. There is no poverty so dire and so humiliating as the spiritual poverty that has nothing to give to the hungry hearts of men. There is no shame like the shame of man or woman who claims to be a Christian and dare not speak in the name of Christ. Nothing more surely reveals the emptiness of our profession. For in presence of such a challenge no counterfeit will be accepted. As it has been put, "A man can only be a witness *to* the Christian faith piety if his life can only be accounted for *by* the Christian faith." In this deepest and truest sense, you can only give what you have.

III. But remember, *you ought to have something to give.*

Else what are you a Christian for? Have you

no witness of your own to bear of God's goodness and mercy to you? You may not be able to say much or say it eloquently; but surely, if need arise, you can give some reason of the hope that is in you. Perhaps you envy Peter for the certainty and boldness of his faith. There was a day, however, when he was neither bold nor certain. There is none so poor or weak or unworthy but may take heart of grace from the story of the son of Jonas. No life is too obscure or insignificant for God to use. Its very obscurity or insignificance may be its highest qualification in His eyes. "For God hath *chosen* the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath *chosen* the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God *chosen*, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in His presence."

That is not pulpit rhetoric. It is the verdict of history. The Church of Christ stands to-day a living witness to its truth. And God still can and still does fulfil His purposes by very humble means. When Stewart of Lovedale urged the St Andrews Students' Club to take up Livingstonia, they shrank from so grave a responsibility on the ground that they were all unknown men. "That matters not," came the swift reply, "if we are earnest men." It was in essence the testimony of Peter: "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee." Can you and I say as much? It is not a question of what we have, but

of what we are. It is not required of us as Christ's stewards that we be rich or learned or influential: it may not be so true as once it was, but it is still in large measure true, that "not many wise men (that is, judged by human standards), not many leading men, not many of good birth, have been called." It is not even required of us that we be successful: some of God's noblest servants have died in the dark, with a sense of defeat in their hearts. What is required of us is that we be found faithful, men of faith. That is a New Testament title for Christians, and it is one to which the lowliest and least of us all can attain. We are not called to *work* miracles: our high calling in Christ is to *be* miracles—miracles of God's redeeming grace, men and women whom the world cannot explain, who are a mystery to it, whom it is compelled to recognize as the product of forces other and higher than its own.

"I know the face of him who with the sphere
Of unseen presences communion keeps.
His eyes retain its wonders in their clear
Unfathomable deeps.

His every feature, rugged or refined,
Shines from the inner light; and large or small
His earthly state, he from the world behind
Brings wealth that beggars all.

This in his face I see; and when we meet,
My earthliness is shamed by him; but yet
Takes hope to think that, in the unholy street,
Such men are to be met."

Can that in any measure be said of you and me? Are we in any sense marked men as we walk "the unholy street"? Do men take knowledge of us, not so much for what we give or do as for what we are, that we have been with Jesus?

VI

WHAT CHRIST DOES FOR A SOUL

ARTHUR J. GOSSIP, M.A.

"Unto Him that loved us, and loosed us from our sins by His blood, and made us priests and kings unto God and His Father."—REV. i. 6.

WHAT exactly has Christ done for you? What is there in your life that needs Christ to explain it, and that, apart from Him, simply could not have been there at all? If there is nothing, then your religion is a sheer futility. But then that is your fault, not Jesus Christ's. For when we open the New Testament it is to come upon whole companies of excited people, their faces all aglow, their hearts dazed and bewildered by the immensity of their own good fortune. Apparently they cannot think of anything but this amazing happening that has befallen them, quite certainly they cannot keep from laying almost violent hands on every chance passer-by, and pouring out yet once again the whole bewildering tale. And always as we listen they keep throwing up their hands as if in sheer despair, telling us it is hopeless, that it breaks through language, that it won't describe, that until a man has known Christ for

himself he can have no idea of the enormous difference He makes. It's as when a woman gives a man her heart; or when a little one is born to very you; or when, after long lean years of pain and grayness health comes back. You can't describe that, you can't put it into words, not adequately. Only, the whole world is different, and life gloriously new. Well, its like that, they say. In their own days people looked at them queerly, as at odd people fussing themselves about extraordinarily little. For they too had heard Jesus Christ, these others, had hung for a little on the edge of the knots at the street corners where He was preaching, but quickly bored had turned away. There's not much in that, they said; and drifted off to other more exciting things: were really annoyed at the foolish people gaping open-mouthed after this upstart who had crazed His head with things too deep for Him.

> "Ye foolish folk of Galilee,
> What is it ye went out to see?
> The reeds that waver, the weeds that float,
> A young man preaching in a boat."

Until the people, learning Christ was not the fashion, quickly streamed away from Him again, and left Him almost quite alone. And even yet that mood is commoner than one cares to think. "Christ," said a popular idol of our day, at one point of his meteoric spiritual career, "What's all this talk about Jesus Christ? I never saw anything in Christ that specially attracted me!" Why does He so attract you?

Why, when you are on your knees in prayer thanking God for His heaped up benefits, after great solid things like health and home and happiness, leaving all that behind, mounting up towards a climax, you say, "And yet most of all we thank Thee," for what? That nineteen centuries ago and more a little laddie grew up in the back streets of a smelly little Eastern town, lived there for thirty years an obscure life, and then suddenly embarked upon what everybody with the right to an opinion told Him was a daft adventure, foredoomed to fiasco. And so, indeed, it proved. Three years or so, and they were standing round a cross, watching Him die; turned on their heels and went their ways, laughing at the poor imposture that they had stamped out. And is that really more to you than health (health's a great thing, as you will know when you have lost it), or home, or happiness? Really? "Don't lie to God," is Jeremy Taylor's first rule for the spiritual life, don't burn false fire upon His altar, don't offer Him more than you have to give. Really? and if so, why?

Well, here is a man who had known Christ for a long time. And as he looks back over it all, he roughly sums the matter up in three things which he feels give some idea of what Christ has done for him, three thimgs so great and wonderful, that all eternity he thinks will be too short in which to give Him adequate praise.

And first, He gave me a new spiritual standing, so he says; I was a serf, born into slavery, and I

am free, and it was Christ who did it. That is a part of what He has brought me. He gave me a new spiritual standing. Mark Rutherford remarks in one place that he would like to add one more to the beatitudes, "Blessed are they who give us back our self-respect," and with good reason surely, for of all gifts theirs is the most healing. So thought the old prophet, picturing us all standing before God, shamefacedly, in filthy garments. If only some one could blot out the past, could grant me a new start, could save me from my failure! If! If! But that's precisely, says John, what Christ did for me! And indeed we can sèe Him at it, as we follow through the gospel pages, and watch Him coming here and there on crushed and crouching figures, who have accepted their defeat, surrendered to themselves, have long stopped even trying, can read their condemnation in every hard eye, and themselves acquiesce in it as just,—that faded frivol of a woman by the well-head, pretty once and witty too, but that was long ago, tashed now and faded, fingered by too many hands, soiled and dropped into the dust, crushed there by any passing foot; that loathsome creature, battening on his country's shame, deservedly without one friend in all his city; look with what malicious pleasure they stood close to cheat the little wretch out of the show! And yet Christ spoke to them as if they too had souls; and gave them of His very best, quite evidently sure they also could respond to it; let them see

frankly that whatever the past be, He for one still believed in them with all His heart. And, with that, the incredible happened, and a soul awoke where you and I would have said that no soul could be. And, looking round on that far country with new eyes a sudden scunner of it all, the mud, the swine, the half-eaten husks, surged through them like a nausea, and they rose up and ran from what they saw was utterly unworthy of them, now that they knew that they too were God's children. And for that same gift of self-respect, we also must go back to that same Giver with the same charity of judgment, and the same kindly eyes. I know that we're not worrying about our sins these days, not in the least. I know we simply don't believe that God can be seriously hurt by decent ordinary little trespasses like ours, I know that because of that the wonder of the cross has dimmed for us. They break in breathlessly, these men of the New Testament. "God is at peace with you," they cry, "think of it, after the deliberate and impudent effrontery with which you have treated Him, He has no grudge against you, no ill-will, no sourness of temper; there is nothing in His mind but kindness and a longing, cost Him what it may, to save and help you who have broken His heart!" And we hardly look up. "I know," we say, "I've heard all that before." "God has forgiven you," they say, their eyes full of astonishment at their incredible news. But we are unimpressed. "Why shouldn't He?" we ask. "Of course," said Heine, "God will forgive me,

that is His job." And we can stand and look up at the cross, and turn and go our way, unmoved, untouched, unwon.

Ah! but it is not always so. When the birds are migrating even creatures born within a cage feel that strange thrill, flutter their useless wings and beat themselves against the bars. And days come to us all when in the face of Christ we see what our own lives should be; and, seeing, grow sick of that most desperate of all diseases, sick of ourselves, struggle and yearn to lift ourselves above ourselves, and to become quite different from this unkempt thing that we are, something cleaner, bigger, far more gallant-hearted. "But ah! that a man might arise in me, that the man that I am might cease to be." Yet, struggle how we may, that other never comes. Our feet turn of themselves into the customary paths, and obstinately we remain our old uncouth, incorrigible selves. Nobody knows how strong a habit is till he tries to break it. Nobody realizes how closely we are all immured in the dark cell of our personality till we are groping desperately in the blackness for some smallest egress through which we can squeeze out into God's light and air. I was a slave, says John. There are those who tell us he was writing from a convict quarry, chained to a gang of the world's most obscene criminals. And he could never get away from the pollution of their presence; lived with them, worked with them, slept with them, with that horror always there. And once upon a time, he says, I was chained to

a hideous thing like this; and I could never get away from it, for struggle how I might the iron held. Because it was myself. But thank God that it is over! For Christ has loosed me from my sins, and I am free,—can live a real life now. Always that is the note of the New Testament, always they are entirely sure there is no sin to which we need surrender, no habit that we cannot snap, no grace that grows so high but we can pluck and wear it in our bosom if we will; that Christ's power in a believer's life is an exceeding great thing that overflows and breaks and sweeps away our hugest measure of it. I wonder do we really credit that? If so, what are we doing in these sorry prison-houses, bound by these rusty chains of ancient habit; so flustered and so tempery, so selfish and the like, accepting that as if it were the only possibility for us; as if the glistering promises were just fine words that of course cannot come really true in us drab ordinary folk, messing among the machinery of common life? Do we not know that Christ can burst these bonds for us to-day, can lead us from our serfdom, from this cowed, uneasy slinking in to heel at the first whistle of bullying sins, into a large and ample liberty? He gave me back my self-respect, says John, granted me a new spiritual standing. I was a slave, and I am free. That's part of the difference Christ made for me. And that amazing gift He offers us to-day.

Further, adds John, musing over it all, He brought a strange new opulence into my life.

Everyone knows that an eastern monarch is a very proverb for prodigality of splendour and extravagance of magnificence. And this man, feeling about for seemly metaphors, lights upon that as at least pointing the road. I was a poor creature, and Christ lifted up my head, gave me a king's life, full and rich and interesting, bulging with happiness every hour I live. Certainly that was our Lord's expectation of what ought to result. Look at the pictures that He uses. I knew a man once, so He tells us, a crofter, a poor soul who lived in a bleak spot among the hills, and who, toiling from early morning far into the night, could barely make the ends just meet, and not one joy nor gladness bloomed about the bare and wind-swept spot. And one day, ploughing a little deeper than his wont, he came upon a hidden treasure, and with that passed at a step from that pinched penury of his to affluence far beyond his wildest dreams. And that, says Christ, that is the difference I make in every life that really grants Me entrance. Or take that other most astounding metaphor of which He was fond. For æons upon æons the world span a finished thing, but dark, silent, dead. Till one day there appeared a something on its surface, a spot of greyness on a stone that spread, something far lower it may be than that. But, with its coming history had begun; and the mind of man, the sacrifice of woman, the witcheries of Beethoven, the mystery of Jesus Christ, all had grown possible, for life was here. "And I," said Christ, "am come

to give you life." What that dull and eventless world is to the earth we know with its colour and its movement and its teeming interests in crowds, that life without Me is to the rich life I give. So He declared. And so men found. We think of the enormous sacrifices of these early Christians; but what struck themselves was the immensity of their inheritance in Jesus Christ. Take that one phrase, surely the most daring that the mind of man ever conceived, " We are the heirs of God." That's what they felt about it, that not God Himself could have a life fuller than theirs, and that even He would share all that He had with them! Tremendous words that stagger through their sheer audacity. And yet here are we whimpering about the steepness of the way, the soreness of the self-denial, the heaviness of the cross, whining and puling, giving those outside the utterly grotesque impression that religion is a gloomy kind of thing, a dim monastic twilight where we sit and shiver miserably, out of the sunshine that God made for us and meant us to enjoy, all a doing what nobody would naturally choose, and a refraining from what everyone would naturally take, a species of insurance money grudgingly doled out less some worse thing come upon us. Is it not a shame that there is not constant sunlight on our faces and a constant wonder in our happy hearts? For take Christ out of life, and what would there be left. I am the very last to sneer at this glorious life of ours. Ah! think of it, out of mere nothingness He made

us, set us thus high in the scale of being, creatures who can look before and after and hold communion with Himself, and think His great thoughts afar off after Him, all just because He willed it, and shall we take this wealthy thing and fling it at God's feet as a poor petty makeshift business? And yet, take Christ out of it all, and what is left save shadows blown along the hills, and gone. God, as we know Him, is a gift to us from Christ. And what were life without the great Companion? "If," said Voltaire once, "if there were no God, we would have to invent one to keep people sane." Apart from Christ, might we not have thought of ourselves as mere ephemerids? But He has taught us we are august creatures who will last as long as God Himself. Apart from Christ might we not have shuffled through our mean life anyhow? But He has endowed us with the vastnesses of eternity, with their illimitable opportunities of growth and service. He gave me a new opulence, says John.

And we too must take it at Christ's hand. For nothing vexed Him more than the strange unambitious ease with which we are satisfied. Verily, verily, He keeps saying disappointedly to us settled down so soon, you will see greater things than these. Why do you camp just across the border of the kingdom—in it, but no more—when, did you but advance and take it, all the length and breadth and fulness of it is your own? As Luke says in his glorious opening of the Acts, "the former treatise have I written unto you of

what Christ did and taught as a beginning." Even Calvary, he felt, did not exhaust Jesus Christ. And whatever you and I may have received from Him, however wonderful it be, it is at most only a preface, a first chapter, a beginning; there is infinitely more. This bare, unimpressive life of ours, with the lean shoulder of your natural character showing all too often through the thin layer of better things superimposed, like wind-blown soil, is not the most He can do for us. He gave me a new opulence, says John, and we also must accept it at His hand.

And last of all, first of all, and most of all, He gave me a new character. For that I suppose is the meaning of that phrase about us being priests to God, and His Father. We ministers may have spoiled the picture for you. But a priest is at least meant to be one who can't live for himself, like other people, but for these others; who is so hurt by the sufferings and sorrows of his fellowmen that he can't get it out of mind, but has to go to God on their behalf, and stagger back with help and heartening for them. And we are all priests, says this man, we Christian folk, none of us can live for himself—have all caught the infection of our Lord's unselfishness—cannot but see that life is given us to spend upon our fellowmen.

Again, it is quite certain Christ expected that to be the case, and tells us so in many most impressive passages. Dives, as you remember, was a most reputable citizen; nothing whatever is alleged against him except this, that, as he rushed

about his busy life, he never noticed a beggar lying in the shadow near his home. No, says Christ, you never noticed, and that proves that between you and Me there lies the distance between hell and heaven. To be self-centred is to be at an immense distance from Jesus Christ. And, among much that is depressing, there is this encouragement these days that the younger generation realize that. They are not obtrusively spiritual, they are not over-fond of church, they have small interest in matters theological, are indeed frankly bored and puzzled by them for the most part; but they do see that a religion to be real must be a service, must be a self-sacrifice; are drawn to Christ not so much by what He gives, rather by what He asks; are touched that He has need of us and deigns to put plans that are dear to Him into our keeping, to lean on our frail loyalties, to stoop to take from our soiled hands. If they come to Him at all, it is apt to be like Isaiah that day when in the Temple he seemed to see God hesitating, looking this way and that, and heard Him say, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Me." Their hearts kindle, leap up and break away before they are aware, and cry, "Here am I, send me"; and that is no ill mood. As Buddha put it long ago to certain Brahmins, "You do well to seek union with God, but you are taking the wrong road. Believe me, you can never manage it merely by reading Scriptures and the like. For God is love, God is unselfishness, God is self-sacrifice. And the one way to become one with Him is to

grow loving and unselfish and self-sacrificing too." He gave me a new character, says John, has taught me to use life in a new way.

Well, what do you think about it all? It seems far off from you and me. Are we even trying to attain to it? We can understand that other passage in the fifth chapter where these words are used of the Redeemed in heaven, their hand at last upon the goal. But no! no! says John, and sets it all down again; (it would seem indeed to have been part of a little hymn commonly sung in their small gatherings) about the stumbling, blundering, tempted, soul-disheartened people round about him. They too had been made free, they too had had their lives enriched, they too were growing day by day into the mind and ways and heart of Jesus Christ. And you and I? Over a waste of years I well remember Dr Rainy flinging out a challenge at our communion table. "Do you believe your faith?" he asked, "do you believe this I am telling you, do you believe a day is coming, really coming, when you will stand before the throne of God, and the angels will whisper together and say, "How like Christ He is!"? That is not easy to believe. And yet, not to believe is blasphemy. For that, not less than that, is what Christ promises. And what Christ promises comes true.

VII

LONELINESS

D. H. Hislop, M.A.

"I sat alone because of Thy Hand."—Jeremiah xv. 17.

In our text the Hebrew prophet confesses the sense of loneliness. He feels separated from his fellows although he dwells in a crowded city. Those around him do not share his deepest feelings. It is loneliness of soul, and yet he knows that this sense of solitude was not the result of chance. The Hand of God was in it, and there was purpose in this feeling of isolation.

Long since dead is that old Hebrew world, and far-off and dim seems much of the thought of those days. But the soul of man is not greatly different, and still to-day like a mist in the darkening hour, there can creep a loneliness over the soul. This mood may be the result of circumstances that separate us from those we know, or it may arise from inner unrest. We may enter it as a temple, or shun it like a dungeon; but soon or late we all know it. "Only the wicked man is alone," said Diderot, and there is truth in the remark. "On the contrary," adds Rousseau, "only the good man is alone," and that also

contains truth. However we explain it, at times we feel around us "the unplumbed salt estranging sea." What I wish to urge is that the experiences which make the soul solitary are not accidental things. We are alone because of God's Hand, and if we fail to recognize that, we miss the meaning and the message of these things. There are four experiences which come to all, and these bring this mood.

I. *There is the loneliness which comes from responsibility.*

Every human soul has its life to live. Nothing can remove from our shoulders the responsibility for what we make of our lives. We may face this or shirk it, take life seriously or lightly, but in the deepest within us we acknowledge this responsibility. "Every man," says the Apostle, "must bear his own burden." "Every soul in its sphere has charge of a lighthouse." Maeterlinck is right here. "Every soul," not simply a few greatly endowed. For no matter how obscure our station, we have our influence. We are making it easier or harder for some one to see God's goodness. The way in which we live is helping or hindering that great power of grace which is in life. Our words and our deeds are like stones thrown into a pool of water, for the ripples spread ever outwards. We can refuse to admit the fact that we are responsible, but we cannot escape the result. A feverish seeking, an incessant running away from unrest. We may hide like the ostrich, but we cannot persuade ourselves that nothing matters.

We can drown for a little the sense that our life is ours and ours to answer for, but only for a little do we really forget, and back returns this devastating sense which separates us and makes us alone. At times, like Moses of old, almost insupportable do we feel this responsibility, and with him we would cry, " I cannot bear this people alone." He has not begun to live who has not felt this.

The loneliness irks because God's purpose is there. We are alone because there is something that human comradeship cannot give, nor this world bestow. There is the soul's need of God, and because this world is God's world our soul will wander solitary until it find the Eternal. We are made to bear our burden alone in order that we may learn to cast our burden on the Lord, and He will sustain. He will not take it away. He will give us strength to bear it. We are still alone, separated by the deep waters of personality from those around, but the loneliness has achieved its purpose if we have found through it the strength and succour of the Unseen. Man cannot live without God. Physically, mentally, morally, life and its responsibilities will break us if we have nothing beyond ourselves. God is the native atmosphere of the soul, and without God life becomes physically neurotic, intellectually lop-sided, spiritually cynical. But the loneliness of responsibility is not meant to destroy us but to lead us to what alone satisfies.

II. *The loneliness of Consecration.*

"The man that God has touched," observes Renan, "is always a being apart." The touch of God in the soul makes us alone. It is the solitude of the heights. Jesus called His disciples by their own name, one by one, and He still does. There must come a time, if we are ever to grow up spiritually, when, as Newman says, "there are only two things in the whole universe—our own soul and God who made it." Nothing else counts then. When God finds us, we find Him for ourselves. A home-sick farm-boy lies asleep on the hillside, and he dreams. The God of his fathers becomes his God, and Jacob is alone. Or to take the most excellent example, we find the loneliness of consecration in the life of Jesus. The boy is lost, and His parents seek. In the Temple He is found, and lo! Mary sees a new look on His face. He has outgrown the life of the home and family. The business of His Father He must needs do.

This loneliness of consecration belongs to youth. Only then is there the vigour and the freshness of the morning. Miss it then, and something is lost for ever. It is true that in any circumstance and at any age the burdened and broken human spirit can find the Eternal Saviour, but there is something about the consecration of the dawn which belongs not to experience. For God has so ordered life that the valour and splendour of our youth are the great opportunity. We may develop the impressions of our youth and confirm them

through experience, but rarely will we look at the world afresh. Living can teach us many things. We learn thereby prudence and skill. We find out how to do things, but it is in the vision of youth we discover what to do. When the wonder of the world is breaking upon us, when life has a zest, when imagination can build its towering castles, when we can go forth to meet life, then it is possible as at no other time to feel that consecration which lights this earth with meaning and makes the glory of God manifest. I do not know if it is always as easy as it might be for a young soul to follow the new vision of life God gives. I would say with all respect to those who are older, that you must not expect the paths you have trodden to be the paths of your children. Your thoughts may not be their thoughts, and what was to you a buckler and defence, may to them be nothing worth. The Lord God brings to the Eternal Kingdom each generation by its own path, and into the strange restless loneliness He calls the young soul, in order that it may see His face and find its Master. And might I say to those who are younger, that your danger is that you are afraid of these moods. You must stand beneath the stars of Heaven. You must feel the strangeness of life. If your life is to be consecrated to any purpose, and if you are to seek God, then you must not shrink from being alone. Out into life with its hazards and temptations, with its glory and wonder. Out on the great adventure of living. Alone the soul must go. Alone with

the great and awful Heights, in order to be alone with God.

> " Christ with His lamp of truth
> Sitteth upon the hill
> Of everlasting youth
> And calls " to you.

III. *The Loneliness of Sorrow.*

There is another loneliness which comes into every life. To you it may have come, to you it may still be coming, but come it must. He who has stood before the dark gates of death knows he must stand alone. When one who is dearer to us than life itself is taken from us, kind and compassionate our friends may be, real their sympathy, but the wound is in our soul, in our heart the stab. Alone we must climb the dark staircase to where there is light. When the disciples of John the Baptist came to Jesus with the bitter tidings of their Master's death, He said, " Come ye yourselves apart." And still God makes lonely in sorrow. The Hand of God is here. In the solitude of sorrow we see. Not in the brave light of the sun, but in the darkness, are the stars in their courses seen. " I do not wonder at what men suffer, but I wonder at what they lose," wrote Ruskin. How often has sorrow taught nothing, and the great lessons that might have been learned have been of no avail. The insight into life's meaning, the vision of sympathy have been lost because God's Hand was not felt. Through the gateway of our own sorrow we can

enter into some sense of the largeness of God's purpose, and the Cross is to us more real thereby.

" For from those ploughed up souls the spirit brings
Harvest at last, and sweet from bitter things."

The loneliness wrought by sorrow is the need that drives us to the strength of God. Nathaniel Hawthorne suggests that God, having given man so many great and glorious gifts, lest this wonderful world should turn man's spirit into a clod, slipped in His gift of death. Do we find God there ? If not, hard and bitter will grow our lives. I sat alone because of Thy Hand. Alone with my sorrow, alone with the dark, gaunt things of life, away from the joy and converse, in order that I might be alone with God.

IV. *Another loneliness I must mention. The most desolate of all. A loneliness I dare not ignore. The loneliness of Sin.*

Alone with the result of our act, our twisted dishonesty, our impure passion, our blinding pride. One day we shall be alone with our sin. " These wounds heal ill that men do give themselves." And who has not wounded himself ? The aspirations we had have been trailed in the mud. The opportunities we have missed. The failure of our resolution, the want of faith, the lack of charity. Our little weaknesses which we are too blind to see as sins. Such weaknesses, such sins of old brought Jesus to His Cross. And the sins of the world—the cruelty, the injustice, the bitterness. How can we say we have no part in them ? They are

but the outer darkness. The inner darkness of men's motives and desires shows itself outside in the sins and wrongs of society and the hates and bitterness of nations. We have wounded ourselves, and who can heal ?

We have lost our way in the mists of our folly. Lost the clear insight that made us know what were the imperishable things over which death hath no power. We have lost life's meaning. We have lost God, and we are groping in the darkness. At times men strike each other as they stumble against one another. They have lost the way. But though the soul may lose God, He does not lose them. And in His mercy He makes us feel our loss.

" Alone, alone, all, all alone,
Alone on a pathless sea."

The inexorable law is written not in the pages of a book, but in flesh and blood, and graven in brain, and spoken in instinct and desire. " What thou sowest that thou shalt reap." With the multitude thou didst sow, but alone thou shalt reap. Be the reaping time now or beyond. Surely and certainly the day will dawn. The utter and desolate loneliness of sin. Our deed has gone forth, and we see something of what it has wrought. And we are alone with this evil thing, with our broken life, our shattered aspirations, alone with this thing we did, and we see it now as sin. But this is God's mercy and not the malice of Fate. It is to make men reach beyond themselves, and find

the strength and the joy of forgiveness. Forgiveness is just seeking God's face, and learning how God has suffered and travailed to redeem. And in the Cross of Christ is God made known.

I sat alone because of Thy Hand—alone with the sin I hate, alone with this thing of evil, that I might learn the need of God's forgiveness, and be alone with God the Redeemer.

VIII

THE POSSIBILITIES OF FAITH

JOSEPH JOHNSTON, M.A.

"If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth."—MARK ix. 23.

THE man to whom these words were addressed had just had his hopes dashed. In the absence of Jesus, he had brought to the disciples his epileptic boy to be cured. They had tried and failed, and the failure he had witnessed had shaken his confidence. When Jesus appears, he renews his request and presses his plea for help. But he is not sure now whether the Master can succeed where his followers have failed, and he does not appear very hopeful. He only manages to make a stumbling appeal to Jesus. "If you can do anything, do help us, for pity's sake."

What was the reply to that? It was something that reassured him and yet aggravated his fear of failure, because it made him responsible for it. He was told in effect, that there was no question of Christ's power or willingness to help him. There was nothing to prevent his son being healed so far as the Healer was concerned. The hindrance was with himself. "If thou canst

believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." Virtually, what Jesus said was, "It all depends on you. Can you give me the necessary conditions?"

In a revealing flash the man sees the peril in which his doubt has placed him. He is obstructing his own petition, and the urgency of his need makes him muster all the confidence he can command. He fights back his misgivings in an agony of spirit. "Lord, I do believe, help my unbelief."

Most of us know the confusion of mind reflected in this conflicting cry. It is a state of mind in which we are unable to believe what we feel to be deeper and truer than our believing power. It is too great for us to take in, too good it seems to be true, yet we know the deficiency is in ourselves and not in the reality. And one reason for believing it is, that we are conscious it is too much for our belief.

Now, like this man, you and I are made to feel in our approach to Christ that His power to do us good is conditioned by something in ourselves, something we have to provide before His power is available. That requirement is faith. The problem is not, "If He can do anything for us," but "if we can believe." "All things are possible to him that believes."

Do you believe that?

You will notice the place and importance our Lord gives to faith not in this instance alone, but in every case He was called to deal with as the Good Physician. It was the invariable condition

of a cure being wrought. Time and again He said to the recipients of His healing power, "Thy faith hath saved thee. Not My power, but thy faith hath made it possible for Me to make thee whole." At another time we read that He did not many mighty works at a certain place because of the unbelief of the people. It was the one temper of mind, the one state of heart that shut up the Saviour's compassion and made His power inoperative. But wherever He was touched by faith, even enough to lie on a finger-tip, His power wrought spontaneously. Virtue flowed out of Him.

Now every miracle is a parable. Every act of healing that Christ performed is an object-lesson speaking of the spiritual work He came to do—to heal the hurt of His people and save them from their sins. That work cannot be done without faith. The moral miracle of regeneration can only be wrought by consent, seeing it touches the region of the will. Even we have to give Christ His opportunity and provide the conditions under which He can redeem our life from its evil and make of it the great thing it was meant to be. Faith is the one thing needful. "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believes." Do you believe that?

It is an arresting statement, and here is another, spoken according to Matthew on this same occasion—only addressed to the disciples. "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder

place and it shall remove." "Ye shall say to this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root and be thou planted in the sea, and it shall obey you, and nothing shall be impossible unto you." There it is again, repeated like a refrain.

Now these read like extravagant statements, but there can be no question that our Lord meant what He was saying. And yet there is no more neglected doctrine in our Scriptures. We quote it often, but we do not mind it much. We call it a figure of speech, and make our escape from its implications under cover of the imagery. But there is a world of difference between not taking a statement literally and not taking it seriously. The hyperbole would have no point if it did not contain the challenge of the truth.

The only thing we have not done with this saying of Jesus, is the one thing we ought to have done—test it, put it to the proof. There is a condition attaching to these high achievements, but it is on the human side, not on the divine. If you and I could only fulfil the necessary requirement, we could do anything in the name of Christ. Almightiness would be at our disposal. I do not believe for one moment that we should be able to exploit divine power for our own ends. That is not what our Lord means. But what He does say is that there is, through Him, a power at our disposal which is effective beyond anything we can conceive. The smallest grain of faith would enable us to achieve apparently impossible results for the furtherance of our life.

Take it out of the Gospel, and see how it looks in another setting. Stripped of all theological colour, it really amounts to this, that there is in us a spiritual force that, when reinforced, is greater in its conscious dominance than anything we term material. In the world of physical things, man removes the mountain by tunnelling it. He transplants forests in the sea when he drives piles to carry a bridge across the estranging gulf. Nature will not step aside to give his virtues room to pass. But he circumvents her. He grapples with the forces that bar his progress. He tames the lightning and harnesses it to his triumphal car. Science is a tremendous believer. It lives by the faith that almost anything may yet be done. It refuses to limit the possibilities. But in the realm of the spirit, how meekly we go under the yoke of our prevailing conditions. We accept too readily the humiliating bondage of circumstances. We say this or that cannot be helped or hindered. It must be submitted to, because it is the Lord's will. And all the time we may be accepting it with a show of reluctance, because it is our own slovenly inclination. The Lord's will is often a blasphemous label we tag on to our own unwillingness to exert ourselves. Resignation is sometimes used as a pious synonym for want of spirit. We are so apt to accept as final a state of things that was only meant to try us. We speak of an untoward experience as a " trial," and here, for once, we have got hold of the right word. That is just what it is, a trial, a test, putting us to the proof to show

what is in us, sent for us "to meet and master, and make crouch beneath our foot, and so be pedestalled in triumph."

Almost any situation can be altered if we only go about it in the right way. We all admit that "where there is a will there is a way." The will makes the way. The willing spirit reinforces the weakness of the flesh. When Napoleon's plan for his Italian campaign was blocked with the objection that the Alps presented an impassable barrier to his advance, he said, "Then there shall be no Alps." There is a spirit in man that can remove mountains. When the old reformer had his projects rejected on the ground that they were impossible. "Impossible!" was his retort, "if that is all there is against them, let us go ahead." You have only got to be terribly in earnest to surprise yourself with what you can do.

Much discussion is taking place in our time about faith-healing and mental suggestion, and a reference to it is very pertinent to the case we are considering. Do I believe in it? When stripped of vagaries and purged of excesses, we must all believe in it—on the evidence. It is not a new discovery, but the re-discovery of a neglected truth that the mind or will is the controller of the body, that divine power is exercised in conformity with natural laws and through the operation of human forces. It is so true, that it is able to put on the market many quack remedies and to give a certain currency to false systems of religion and morals. But the abuse of the truth does not make

it untrue. There can be no healing without faith. Every physician knows that. He knows that, in certain circumstances, the confidence his presence inspires is as beneficial to the patient as any medicine he prescribes. There is a great deal of sickness that need not be, if there were faith enough to cast it out. For if we admit that the belief that they are ailing can make people actually ill, we must also admit that the prayer of faith can help the sick and restore those who have a desire to be well. There is really no limit to the achievements of faith. "All things are possible to him that believes."

See what can be done by a man who believes in himself. Why, the book of history is a written testimony to the fact that the men and women who influence their times and impress their contemporaries are the people who have a firm belief that they can overtake what they undertake.

A man who trusts himself will initiate schemes that make the diffident faint with apprehension for him, and he will succeed in carrying them through, for he will pursue them with a life-and-death earnestness. He will blaze a trail through untrodden wastes, and in the end he will accomplish the apparently impossible, for he will make others believe in him and co-operate with him. "All things are possible to him who believes in himself." Cromwell's Ironsides turned the tide of battle on many a stricken field, and never knew defeat, because they considered themselves invincible. Emerson's dictum, "They can conquer

who believe they can," is verified every working day.

Or think of the influence exerted by one who has faith in his fellow-men. We all know something of the spell cast by certain people who are able to draw out the best that is in us. In their company we simply excel ourselves. Under their encouragement we expand and add a cubit to our stature. We realize our possible selves and rise to the height of our power. We can do what we would be incapable of otherwise, because they believe in us and meet us with a frank and trusting spirit that calls out our latent capacities. They are so different from the cynic who sprays us with acid, as some insects do, until we curl up into a ball in self-defence. We shrink and shrivel in their presence.

But there is no greater wonder-worker in the world than the faith of a good man or woman who believes that we are really greater than we know. By their confidence in us, we are reminded of what we once aspired to be. The aspiration we had given up is again brought near enough to tempt our reach, and we are encouraged to achieve it, almost in spite of ourselves. It is the high-water mark of experience. Some invisible moon has brought up the tide of our power, and life is once more at the full.

All things are possible to him who believes in his fellows. He gets the best out of them. Nelson's men won the victory of Trafalgar, because their captain believed they would, and told them so.

It is faith that wins battles, not big battalions. "This is the victory that overcometh the world—even our faith."

Now listen! If faith in oneself and one's fellows can work such wonders, need we be surprised if faith in the Son of God with power can put at our command a force that is practically irresistible? If men and women have made history by trusting themselves and by confiding in others, what could they not do by trusting Christ?

"Well," you say, "that is all very true in theory, only it does not work out in practice. I believe in Christ, and it makes little or no difference in my life. I have still the same insuperable difficulties to face and the same sense of abject helplessness in presence of the domineering laws of nature and the stubborn facts of experience. There are times when I feel 'in amplitude of dreams a god, a slave in dearth of power.'" If that be so, then you don't believe. You have not got faith. You may not even understand what it means. For this saving faith of which we are speaking, this faith that works and works wonders, is not the creed or confession to which you subscribe. It is not your *credo* but your *fides*, your confidence in Christ begotten by the appeal He makes to you. It has more of a moral than an intellectual quality. It need not be denied that it is founded on a reasoned belief of some sort, but it is something different from it, more intimate, more personal, more practical. It is akin to the credit on which commerce

is conducted, the goodwill on which society is based.

"Faith," says the writer to the Hebrews, "means being confident of what we hope for, being convinced of what we do not see." It is not a passive state of mind but an active exercise of the will, and when it is exercised toward Christ, it involves an act of committal. It may even be an act of self-abandon. You may say, looking at a frozen pond, "I believe that ice is bearing," but if you refuse to go on in case you should go through, then you don't believe it is bearing. You may say, looking round in the morning, "I believe the weather is going to be fine, but in case it shall break down I shall take my rain-coat." Then you don't believe it is going to be fine. Faith is not believing in spite of evidence, as has been said, but it is acting in scorn of consequences. Faith is confident of things hoped for. It makes no provision for failure. It risks something. It risks everything.

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, which is the secret of the Christian life, is not having opinions about His person and His power and giving a mere intellectual assent to His claims. It is having a conviction of them amounting to an active interest that tests and tries them and puts them daily to the proof. Savonarola said, "A man only believes what he puts into practice." So faith is not the petrified attitude of dumb devotion we take it to be, but it is one of those high inspirational forces by which men truly live,

" for the just shall live by their faith." It is a venture that stakes its all on what looks like a gambler's throw, but it wins, because it puts Christ on His honour. It dares Him to fail you, and we have His word for it, verified by all the ages of Christian experience, that " anything can be done for one who believes."

" When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth ? " He will look for it then among those who are living the life of faith, and making a divine adventure of it, not among us, who are only feeling our religious pulse and taking our spiritual temperature, and discussing the doubts and perplexities of our inquiring spirits.

The writer to the Hebrews creates an order of merit, the Order of Faith, and the men and women who qualify for a place in it and have their names inscribed on the Roll of Honour, not only *believed* things, they *did* things.

" Through faith, they subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of the weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens." By their faith they did things, great things, glorious things—

> " They climbed the steep ascent of heaven
> Through peril, toil and pain.
> O God ! to us may grace be given,
> To follow in their train."

IX

THE WORD OF THE CROSS

DANIEL LAMONT, B.D.

"The word of the Cross. . . ."—1 COR. i. 18 (R.V.).

THE Word of the Cross is the word which God has spoken to men through the Cross of His Son. It is the supreme word. It is in line with all He has spoken "at sundry times and in divers manners," yet it is new in its fullness, its finality, its urgency. God speaks to us through Nature, which is the work of His hand, but for many the voice is not distinct enough, and at the highest it is only a partial word. A recent writer has described a distinguished naturalist as walking through the garden without seeing the Gardener. Ah! the eye which is not enlightened from the right source will always miss the Gardener. God speaks to us also through History, in the rise and fall of nations, the inexorableness of the moral order, the increasing purpose running through the ages, and chiefly in those choice souls to whom it has been given to hear His voice there. If man is the crown of Nature, we should expect the voice of God to be most articulate and complete in history, but history without the Cross of Christ is

a maze without a clue. In His Son Christ Jesus, God once and for all spoke His great word to man. There was none other through whom He could speak it, for Jesus alone walked through this earth in His Father's Will. And the Cross of Jesus is pre-eminently the Word of God.

I. What is the Word of the Cross? In the first place, it is God's supreme *Declaration* to men. There, in the Cross of His Son, He has declared that the whole human race is smitten with the worst of all maladies, the leprosy of sin, and that the one remedy for this malady comes from the wounds of Jesus. Sin is the worst of all human maladies, because it is the ultimate source of all the rest, and because it leads inevitably to a destiny so awful that no language is adequate to describe it. The New Testament usually calls it "death," but that obviously means far more than simply the debt of nature; it means death in the realm of the spirit, which to the eye of Jesus looms out as the crowning human tragedy. No one can do anything worse than allow the disease of sin to go on doing its deadly work. And no one can do anything better than take God's remedy and commend it lovingly and earnestly to his fellow-men.

The leprosy of sin has features which are clearly marked. It opens its attack with stealth. The boy is in its grip before he knows where he is. Or if, in his school-days, he has by a miracle escaped the moral corruption which pollutes the atmosphere of this world, he soon finds himself allured, by the fascination of things which may be harmless in

themselves, into a way of life which has only one ending—death. It is often by absorption in the second best that one misses the best, and thus makes shipwreck of life. Opening with stealth, sin follows up its first success by the process of paralysing the moral sense. The shock is but slight at the first, so slight as to be unobserved in the normal case. If through some cause it is observed at any point in the process, it is the way of this disease to project into its victim's mind the suggestion that he is able at any moment to shake himself free and be as if he had never entertained the enemy. How easily do men delude themselves. By a moral law which is as unfailing as any law of nature, the man who keeps dallying with sin comes to a point where he is no longer free, for sin is the master and he is the slave. His leprosy is the very law of his being. He is sold under sin.

The Cross of Christ declares that this has befallen our race as a whole. Do we accept this declaration as true? Yes, if we have made Him our Lord, for it is the verdict of His Cross upon the human heart. But the world has not yet accepted it. Will it ever do so? Certainly it is still too proud to admit the presence of the fatal malady or the need to be indebted to God for the remedy. According to the estimate of this world's wisdom, there is little or nothing wrong with man. It is compelled by force of circumstances to see that all is not well with the world to-day, but it is always other nations, other classes, other people

who are wrong. So has it always been. The human heart is reluctant to confess its own bankruptcy and its tragic need of God. It was this same reluctance that made the Cross of Christ seem a stumbling-block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks. It is the same that makes so many modern men and women, even when they talk with something like religious fervour of soldiers going to self-sacrifice for their country, scorn the idea of God making any sacrifice for men. Sin secretes pride from its own essence and uses it as a smoke-screen to hide its hideousness from the eye of the soul.

But the Word of the Cross resounds over land and sea. It declares that we are all bankrupt until we confess our debt to God, plague-stricken until we recognize our remedy in the Cross of the Saviour. It declares that there are only two ways of it for human beings—the way of the world and the way of Christ. This world came out in its true colours once, only once, when the acid test was applied to its life and ways. That was when Jesus, the Son of God, came to it and came to save it too. What did it do with Him ? It nailed Him to the tree. That was the way of the world then, and it is the same to-day. The leopard has not changed his spots. Look at Europe and see the god of material force enthroned among his wretched victims. Look at our own country and America, the hope between them of our white civilization, and see there the god of money sharing empire with the god of pleasure, the leprosy of sin

gaining upon both nations all the time. Saddest sight of all, look at the Church of Jesus Christ and see her pandering in a hundred ways to the same world that crucified her Lord. I tell you, brethren, the way of the world is so broad to-day that most people can see no other. But Christ lives. Up hearts.

There *is* another way for mortal men to take. It is the way of Christ. His Cross has declared it, and even if this way be narrow, so that they who find it are few, it is a glorious way, and there is room in it for all. It is the way of holy love, that same holy love wherewith Jesus confronted the mad rage of this world on Calvary. *We* know that there, upon that Cross, what St Paul calls "the weakness of God" triumphed over the might of men. Victory remained with love and Christ and God. For God raised Christ from the dead. And although that means nothing to a blind and uncomprehending world, it means everything to us who believe in God through this same Jesus Christ our Lord.

II. What is the Word of the Cross? It is the supreme *Work* of God for men. When God speaks, His word is always more than a declaration. Something happens. "And God said, Let there be light, and there was light." His word affects the nature of things; Jesus said: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." We may take it that there our Lord was thinking specially of the work of saving men. As soon as our race sold itself to the service of sin, God not only willed

but also worked for our redemption. He has been working for it until this hour. Jesus came into this life of ours, and from that moment when, in His own Baptism, He identified Himself with our sinful race, He also worked in His Father's Will for the same end. He healed the sick and raised the dead and preached the Gospel to the poor. But the consummation of His redeeming work, and of His Father's redeeming work, was that which He accomplished on the Cross. During His earthly ministry there were many things which disappointed Him, many things which wearied Him to exhaustion, and some things which taxed His spiritual energies beyond the normal. And the gospels make it as plain as anything can be made, that what taxed Him far beyond anything else was His death. The black shadow of the Cross haunted His days increasingly as His ministry advanced; His soul became "exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." In Gethsemane He was "in an agony." The cry of desertion was wrung from Him upon the Cross. Even if there were no other proof of it, the intensity of His anguish proves that the Cross was *His* supreme work and *God's*.

God did an incomparable work for us men by the Cross of His Son. It was God that did it, and He did it through One, His only and well-beloved Son. That is a simple thing to say, but I wonder if we have let it sink deep enough into our hearts. The part which man played in the supreme event might well make our whole race

blush to lift up its eyes to heaven. No human being can take any credit for this thing which God has done. How can anyone be proud in presence of the Cross ? In deep humility we adore Him who did it all for us. There are many ways, no doubt, by which people can be *attracted* to Christ. But neither is there any doubt about this, that the only way in which we can be *linked* to Him in that union which makes us " more than conquerors " is through a passionate gratitude to " Him that loved us." To Jesus Christ, through His Cross, we owe everything that matters. We owe it to Him that the way is open to all of us from death to life. If our destiny is to be heaven and not hell, we owe it all to Him. We owe it to Him if we are able to sit lightly by this world, whether it smiles or frowns upon us, and count all things but dross in comparison with Him. We owe Him our forgiveness, our power to forgive and love all men, our deepest peace, our highest joy, and the fairest of all hopes. How *can* our hearts be cold to Him who gave Himself for us ?

What is the Word of the Cross ? It is in the third place, God's supreme *Offer* to men. If God could have saved all men by some mechanical contrivance, He would have done it long ago. But it belongs to the nature of human beings that they cannot be saved that way. You cannot compel a person to love you by the exercise of physical force. And it is our love that God wants. Some people turn away from the Cross of Christ because, in their opinion, it is a kind of mechanism

or a quirk of law. No one can ever think or say that who has looked at the Cross with eyes which God has opened. God has drawn very near to us in the Cross of His Son, as near as He can come. He offers us His hand and He entreats us to take it. That we possess the power to give Him a refusal is the baffling problem. It is a problem, but it is none the less a fact. I suppose that the liberty to take His hand carries with it somehow the liberty to refuse to take it. That is the summit of life's responsibility. A royal invitation takes the form of a command. God's invitation to men is the most regal of all commands. It is as imperious, as urgent, as beseeching as the Cross of Christ. The holy love which endured all and conquered all upon the Cross passes into the offer of His hand to you and me.

To take His hand means surrender on our part. Let there be no mistake about that. To take it means that we are done with our pride, our evasions, our self-deceptions. It means that we are ready to be done with the false and ugly things which we see in ourselves, and those other false and ugly things which we cannot see for sheer blindness, but which the pure eye of God sees so well. It means that we are ready to let the whole world go and endure every kind of hardship and loss for the sake of Him who died for us. Jesus never bribed anyone to follow Him with promises of ease, and His Cross bribes none to-day. He offers us a hard road which looks from the distance as if it would make our feet

sore and our hearts sick. It is a road "somewhat ascending."

But to take God's hand means that all is changed for us. We ourselves are changed. After all, this is on the forefront of His offer to us. He promises to make all things new for us when we make the great surrender, and He has never once broken His word. And so, when we are sick of our own futility, sick of our sins, sick of ourselves, we leap to the offer, grasp the Hand, and step upon the upward way. If a man says, as many do say, "I am not sick nor am I likely to be sick of myself; I don't need to become a new creation," well, the words of Jesus seem to echo the answer: "They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick." The Cross sends out its offer to all men who need the help of God, and the man who thinks he does not need that help is living in a fool's paradise. When the world says: "Religion is only for weaklings," it is really making a boast of its blindness, but we do not resent its scorn; we pity it. What it says is true, even if the soul that says it is false. We *are* weak, very weak, without the help of God. I had rather a thousand times be a weakling with my hand in the hand of Christ, than be the strongest man that ever lived his proud life alone. But he who has put his hand in that of Christ is no longer a weakling. Out of weakness he is made strong. For the Word of the Cross offers strength and victory to all who are content to become as little children: to all, that is to say, who come down from their pride and

confess themselves poor, weak, sinful folk, in absolute need of a Divine Saviour. "Who is he that overcometh the world?" That is a challenge as well as a question. But the challenge has never once been met save by One who met it triumphantly upon His Cross, and by those who have shared His triumph in simple and joyous faith.

And so the Word of the Cross is God's supreme Declaration, Work and Offer in Christ Jesus. "Life from the dead is in that Word." Yes, and the whole love and entreaty and urgency of God are in it. A man who undertakes to declare this Word of God to men must tell it out plainly, fully, passionately. He dare not have a cold heart. There must be no dubiety or hesitancy in his message. He must use great plainness of speech, and his heart must be full of radiant love.

"Well may this glowing heart rejoice."

In these days of dark confusion, God is calling for men and women who shall speak a plain and loving word to their fellow-men. Once and for all He has spoken His word through the Cross of Christ, and those who have heard it must pass it on. If they have really heard it they cannot but pass it on. It will melt the coldness of the world when it comes from the Cross through hearts which are hot.

"We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God." Amen.

X

THE QUALITY OF OUR BELIEF IN THE DIVINE ACTION

J. H. Chambers Macaulay, M.A.

"He performeth the thing that is appointed for me; and many such things are with Him."—Job xxiii. 14.

Religion is in danger of being lost in a clash of creeds and a confusion of cults. The essence of this text lies in a personal conviction. The writer has a firm hold on a vital faith. He has reached to the beginnings of a saving knowledge. He knows what he knows, and he knows what he does not know. He passes through anguish to discovery. His belief is centred upon a God of rational, purposeful and energetic action. He is aware of God in a definite personal relation to himself, not merely as an idea, but as an Energy in direct contact with himself. His experiences, and all the events and hazards that encompass his soul, are viewed by him as in direct contact with a divine action. There is a clear and clean sincerity in his convictions. He is frank and open. He permits us to see into his inmost soul, and he gives us a sufficient insight into the blend of thought and suffering that make the transparent

medium through which the quality of his belief is seen. His suffering spirit is thrown back on God, and then in a rational integrity he is pushed straight forward to lay hold on the living, active God who is the ground of his vital faith. In the *logic* of his search God eludes him. East, west, backward, forward the definite idea escapes him. He is baffled as he reaches out to the invisible, the inscrutable, the intangible, the unknown. God is. The divine will and action are evident, yet he cannot come face to face with this God in the discussions of his soul. God as an idea is indefinite, but God as a personal will working through definite action to definite ends is not to be evaded. *Where the idea of a personal God eludes him the definite action of God finds him.*

The mysterious thrill of a reverent and awful certainty fills his soul with a reverent and rational conviction of the working of God—a working that is in definite relationship to himself which can neither be evaded nor frustrated. He is unable to escape from the divine action in the world and in immediate personal relation to himself. His whole soul is moved within him, and the conscious realization of the impact of the divine will on his life leaves him prostrate in a believing homage. When he thinks deeply and considers this thing, he is afraid and God maketh his heart soft and the Almighty troubleth him. God visibly acts. This action of God is absolute. In the realization of this fact lies the ground conviction and the awe-inspiring certainty of his vital faith.

A belief so grounded in the fact of God in the reality of life has the quality in it of creative power. It is this quality of belief that modern men need, and without which the message and ministry of the Church is powerless.

It is clear that religion cannot live and thrive on make-believe. It is equally clear that faith cannot flourish on half-belief, misbelief or unbelief. Speculations concerning God are of little practical value. Vague ideas and indefinite opinions concerning religion end in nothing that is worthy. It is the worth of a soul-searching, rational and moral conviction concerning the energy and purposeful activity of God that gives saving energy to the perplexed and suffering sons of men. A firm and intelligent conviction of the action of God, an experimental knowledge of His living power in the world, and a reverent response to His personal energy in the human spirit are the first grounds of a recreating belief and a saving faith. This quality of belief is, and ought to be, the supreme end of every man or woman who has any sense of reality and downright earnestness. It is a soul test. It gives proportion and order to all other beliefs, and becomes the standard of real soul values.

With regard to the official standards of the Church the time may be ripe for credal revision. The only reserve we have in this matter is the ripeness of the hour. Revision can only justify itself when it is clear and affirmative and is competent to give a living expression to vital faith. It can never be the duty of the Church of God to

fight merely rearguard actions in relation to modern knowledge. A credal policy of evasion and mere concession to hostile forces has in it no power to recreate languishing beliefs. Religion demands affirmation of life, and faith requires convictions that command the soul. The worn-out traditions that hinder souls must give place to assertions that proclaim the divine action.

It fills one with a wistful sadness to find any earnest search for God hindered, or to contemplate men and women on their spiritual pilgrimage who have delivered themselves over to merely artificial authorities, or who accept a faith on a mere hearsay and traditional evidence. Religion then becomes an external submission instead of an inward responsible life, or a gloomy acquiescence instead of a joyful and an enduring service. Neglect, carelessness and indifference are the first-born children of a nominal or formal faith, and the soul that takes its way through life, as if religion was a personally conducted tour to the heavenlies, is doomed to disappointment and uncertainty. Religion then lacks the quality in the texture of belief that gives the mind and spirit a sense of self-passion and establishes the conscience and the will in the knowledge of their whereabouts. In any real moral and spiritual sense a casual faith and a formal belief possesses neither vital interest nor inspiring confidence. They leave the soul on its mysterious journey much in the position of Du Maurier's elderly spinster, who, on being asked by a *table d'hôte* neighbour whither she

was proceeding, replied, "I am going to Lucerne."

"But, madam, you are in Lucerne."

"Oh! Well, then, I am going on to Milan."

In this wonderful and bewildering world, the sense of spiritual adventure and destiny demand that quality in belief that is confident of an intelligent and responsible relation to the divine presence and control and hope in life.

A living creed should give expression to a living faith in direct contact with God and with life. Religion is life. Its truth brings no shadowy or fitful joy, but a joy in realities born of suffering and patience, that can be captured, practised, and retained. The intimate mystery of God may be veiled in words, but its knowledge goes as deep as the abyss of experience and rises as high as the splendour of God in the business of living.

To fight a good fight; to meet the fact of God amid the soul-soundings of the passage perilous; to cling in anguish, reverence and fear to what is vital; to give oneself to no vague loitering of dilletante inquiry; to meet mental credulity with the stern realities of moral responsibility—is to force the soul back on God and the whole Challenge of life. To come by a personal faith in the action of God and to recognize that action as the reality of life is a belief worth holding. Such a faith has in it a superb quality that holds us through fire and water and brings us unto a wealthy place. It is that quality of belief which rests in the rational and moral realizations of God.

It carries the whole man with it. It acts. It becomes the inner secret of all spiritual endeavour, and it inspires and controls the decisions of will. It directs the whole life not by a selection of ideas or opinions with regard to God, but in a *seeing of Him as He is*, and in an *obedient response* to His outgoing energy of love and righteousness, *He works in us and for us.* "He performeth the thing that concerneth me; and many such things are with Him."

Let me bring this impregnating secret of religion to the definite and distinctive Christian issue.

It concerns us to know what God hath verily done. To understand the supremacy of His action and to have a real knowledge and a true experience concerning it is a secure and saving knowledge. It is not our immediate business to seek to justify the ways of God with men. It is not our business to fabricate a Gospel. It is our business to proclaim the revelation of God in His passionate redeeming action. The Christian religion is first and foremost a revelation of the divine purpose and action in Redemption. God loves and thinks. *For God to love and to think is to act.* The distinctive truth of Christianity is the fact of God's redeeming action revealed in a definite personal way. The experience of the Christian is his response to this distinctive action.

The revelation of Jesus Christ is the culminating revelation of the divine energy on man's behalf. It is instructive to pause a moment and to consider how this action of the redeeming God is in

harmony with the divine immanence in all things, and the working of God in creation and history. As we give serious attention to such a consideration as this, it is well also for us to give heed to the limitations of human knowledge and the limited ways of human faculties. The deepest culture and the most illumined wisdom falls far short of the creative glory and the redeeming grace of the God of our belief. There is a subtle and playful irony, that will carry the lesson of humility to all those who are wise, in the words of that master of style who gallantly wrote,

> "It's strange that God should fash to frame
> The earth and heaven so heigh;
> And clean forget to explain the same
> To a gentleman like me."

A transformation is going on before our eyes in the attitude of men's minds and in the modern outlook on fields of knowledge and discovery. New boundaries are being crossed, the significance of things is taking on new aspects. The material universe is spoken of in terms of spiritual energy. Science is friendly to-day to the idea of God, and speaks in terms of the operating energy of the divine will and action. Camille Flammurion bears this message to us to-day from the study of the stars. Hermann Reinheimer speaks the same thing in terms of biology. Some of his words are very significant. Spiritual forces and moral principles are the basis of life. This is the scientific position: "The recognition of values in the organic

world brings the whole course of evolution to the test of moral principles."

There is on all hands a recognition of, and a concentration upon, the acknowledgment of the divine action. This attitude and outlook is a revolution in secular thought, and the transformation from a harsh hostility to religion to a reverent acknowledgment of God, must have immediate and increasing influence in moulding men's minds in new channels favourable to the spiritual view of things and to the realities of a religion that proclaims the definite action of God in relation to the conscience and the character of men. In such an atmosphere of modern thought, where rationalism itself desires to be baptized with the secret of religion, and wherein the thought of the immanent God is frankly recognized, there surely is a new opportunity presented of urging on men the fair and free and frank consideration of the action of God in the fact of Jesus Christ and in the vocation of the Christian Church. There are many aspects of this revelation of the redeeming God in time, in history, and in the experience of the souls of men. The action of divine love is universal, but the supreme energy of God as seen and experienced in

THE GOSPEL OF JESUS

is the apprehension of the personal activity of God *in making the world one with Himself.* It is a far cry from the epic of Job to the Cross of Calvary. This deepening apprehension constitutes

the unity of revelation and the final and complete disclosure of the love and righteousness of God as seen in vital action working out salvation for the seeking sons of men. If from the bleeding passion of our souls there goes forth the cry: "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him!" our stricken spirits respond to that action of God which is disclosed in Jesus Christ and in the Gospel of the divine love made manifest to the deepest needs of human experience.

The supreme grace in God is made operative in the souls of men. Their union with God is accomplished in a supreme reconciling act. "All things are of God who hath reconciled us to Himself and gave to us the ministry of reconciliation." This range of the divine action in Christ covers the whole field of human hope and human endeavour. There is no moral and spiritual limit to the outworking of God in the personal revelation of Himself as reconciled Redeemer and Saviour. God thus deals as He alone can deal with the souls of men. He comes to them in the perfection of His love and in the creative power of His righteousness. The person and work of Jesus declares the character of God in redemptive action. The soul-cry of man is answered in

The Cross of Christ.

God's action culminates here and in all that the Cross conveys in Him who reveals the Father and becomes to us the resurrection and the life. This

act transcends all human theories. It becomes the centre from which God works in the moral and spiritual energies by which man is transformed from sin unto holiness. The intuitions of man's soul and the integrity of the rational will give a complete consent to that dynamic action that is the wisdom and the power of God. The eternal love is focussed into the human conscience and radiates unto eternal life in the believing Spirit. In the quality of our belief there comes the haunting spirit of a new awakening and the sudden quickening of a new creative life. We recognize the august grandeur of its source. The approach to the Gospel which reaches us in Jesus is through the heart and will of God Himself. The overtones of the Almighty thrill into time and palpitate in the souls of men—"All things are of God." "Before the foundation of the world." Before the times eternal, "The Eternal purpose"—"Purposed in Christ Jesus." This is the way the glorious Gospel of the blessed God reaches men, and God Himself walks body deep in human history and in human experience to redeem and to save the world. From His high heart of grace God comes forth in a majesty of action that is all love, all righteousness, all truth. This is the quality of the Gospel of the good tidings of God, and the quality of our belief should in some measure meet its grandeur and bring our souls into its obedience. Dogma may emphasize the quantity of our beliefs, the realities of the divine grace emphasize its quality. If for any reason the Church mishandles

her divine message; if men have filled their mouths with arguments, and the patois of the pulpit has become the boredom of the thoughtful and earnest men; then the hour has come for a new and deepened energy in the proclamation of the Gospel of God. If the repetition of dogmatic jargon has hardened into a dead tradition, and the realities of the divine action in the power of redeeming love have dehumanized the religion of the conscience and the soul, then the time is ripe for the recreation of living truth in the woven texture of official beliefs.

The Righteousness of God

is a vital thing. In one sense the Cross of Christ stands in a solitary grandeur and makes its eternal appeal to men. In another sense the Cross is never a mere symbol in isolation. It is a real action in the soul. The pardon and the peace of God is no external blessing. Forgiveness is a holy action through the inworking of the holy law of God. It becomes an inborn righteousness penetrating inwards to the very joints and marrow, bringing men and societies and nations into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and transforming and transfiguring the whole life of man with the new will, the new love, the new truth and the new power of God. God hath given and committed to us this new faith and new service of reconciliation. Nothing lies outside the divine action, the divine grace and the divine relation-

ship. The divine action is a living and continuous thing. The death of Christ is never received rightly apart from His resurrection power, His gift of the Holy Spirit, His leadership of the Church and His action in the world. God in Christ is a constant redeeming and sanctifying energy. Men, societies and nations may dash on in the reckless frolic of their own wayward self-will, but the bit of God is in their mouth and His bridle upon their jaws. He will bring forth righteousness to the light and judgment as the noonday. "And should my heart say nought but no," says Jacob Boehme, "yet will I throw myself with the suffering and the death of Christ, yet will I remain in His death, who has become for me an Eternal Life."

Men may still shoot out the tongue and wag the head. Hostile forces may gamble beneath the Cross of Christ, dividing His garments and casting lots upon His vesture. Nevertheless, God's holy love and sacred action draws us still. Amid scorn and disdain, *Amor meus crucifixus est*—my love is crucified, and I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God and the wisdom of God *to every one that believeth.*

"Be thankful the price and the payment,
The birth, the privation, the scorn,
Are finished, the Star brought us morn.
Look Starward! Stand far and unearthly,
Free souled like a banner unfurled,
Be faithful, my brothers, be faithful,
For a God was the price of a world."

Will you say Him nay, who hath done such great things for you? See God stretching out hands to save you, His grace reaches you from the eternal sacrificial love of His own redemptive heart. Will the passion of God leave your heart cold and your conscience seared? His action calls you to the vocation of the high and holy Cross. The world needs you, and God needs you in the offices of His reconciling grace. He hath in the Reconciler compassed your differences, He hath made the things that concern you consistent. His self-subsistent and efficient grace hath made all things possible to you in Christ Jesus. He hath made it possible for you to love again. What can I say more, *Amor meus crucifixus est*—my love is crucified. Now, then, we are ambassadors for Christ as though God did beseech you by us. We pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. Let your belief measure the divine action, and your service of the Kingdom of God express the rich quality of that belief.

XI

"THE GOD TO WHOM WE PRAY"

W. M. Macgregor, D.D.

"Thus shalt thou say to the children of Israel, I will be hath sent me unto you. . . . Thus shalt thou say to the children of Israel, Jehovah, the God of your fathers, hath sent me unto you."—Exod. iii. 14, 15.

(*Preached at the opening of the General Assembly, 18th May* 1920.)

Grammarians tell us that this great name of God ought to be translated not as a present but as a future, not as "I am" but "I will be," and this is not to be dismissed as one of the teasing modern changes with which some undevout scholars have impoverished the Book. That great master in experimental theology, Rabbi Duncan, says bluntly, "'I am that I am' is really 'I will become what I will become.' So in due time He was made flesh; but He did not tell Moses that it was to be flesh." Mere grammarians have not always been of much service in edification, but in this case, clearly, they become ministers of faith by giving us a noble and cheering thought of God.

In most languages the names by which God is known are obscure in their meaning, but this one is radiantly clear. "I will be"—I am going to

be something to you, to do something for you; what you have seen in the past is not the limit of My bounty, it is only the beginning. And thus the name is almost equivalent to "The Coming One"; it is a word of hope and promise without any touch of reservation. Through all the vicissitudes of our mortal life—the joys of it, and the labours, and the perils, and the escapes, the people who know His name may still be sure of Him; and even of the last necessities it is written, "When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee."

But if we start thus, reading the Name as a promise, the question at once arises as to the reception which we are to give it. God to His creatures may say, "I will be," but if they seek nothing from Him, looking to the earth and not to Him for succour, His word is spoken in vain. The Lord Jesus in certain villages could do no mighty works "because of their unbelief," He, whose name is "I will be," is constantly hindered through the poorness of men's notions of what they would desire from Him. We read in the gospels of a witless lad who asked Jesus to come in as arbiter in some miserable business of dividing a succession, for that was the best use he could imagine for the Lord of all light and healing; and many people to-day have thoughts every bit as sordid of what the great God might bring them. A promise without reserve is put at our disposal in this Name,—men and brethren, what wisdom or boldness are we showing in our response?

I. Now first of all, *experience* should help us in our answer, for, as our text reminds us, the God who is to be is the God also of the past, the Lord God of our fathers.

Israel was facing a fresh adventure, but by no means with an empty mind. Even in their slave cabins in Egypt the older folks had rehearsed the story of their forebears. It was not wholly clean or noble, but running through it like a golden thread was a record of divine interpositions. God had dealt with each of the fathers in turn as if He had no other object of His care. He had borne with them though they were often in the mire, and by His patience and His strength He had brought them to the heights. It is no wonder that Israel, looking doubtfully along the unknown way, should ask this first of God that He should be to them what so gloriously He had been to their fathers. Surely He would not be less to those who seemed to need Him more.

We have a wealthier record to fall back upon than theirs—a New Testament as well as an Old, and both are marked by the same divine urgency of giving. When prophets were needed in the old time, it is said that God *rose up early* and sent them; and of Jesus it is justly said by Augustine that "He tarried not but ran." He was a spendthrift in life, with no desire to stint or hoard. It warmed His heart to see the woman break the flask so that the treasure of fragrance was expended in an hour, for that was His own way. When He gave it was without reserve; "having loved His

own that were in the world He loved them to the uttermost." When we thus recall the Gospel story and see God in every detail of it, we may well take courage, for the future is inhabited by the same God, and it is sure to match the past. "If He spared not His own Son, surely with Him He will also give us all things freely."

Many of us have recollections more individual than these. In Scotland we have seen days of revival, "when there was mid-sea and the mighty things." Then the eternal things came up before men and looked near, and a universal compulsion of human souls seemed not wholly out of reach. Unlikely people were transformed, and the most obstinate obstructions gave way. Some of us have experienced in ourselves great hours, when the dross seemed burned away, and the nobler stuff for a while ran clear. Even poor creatures amongst us have had seasons of uplifting and light and nearness. And thus when God's name—"I will be"—is proclaimed, our answers might be prompt: "Amen, Lord, be what Thou hast been! make to-morrow rich like these great yesterdays, and we shall ask no more," for experience makes men brave in their petitions. "It was not always dry land where we dwell," says Thoreau; "far inland I see the banks which the stream once washed. And the life in us is like the water in the river, which any year may rise higher than man has known it, and flood the parched flats. Even this may be that eventful year." It is so, he ends, and it is so, if we remember the Lord God

of our fathers and His Name, that we ought to think and pray, for the future, with God in it, cannot be less than the past.

II. *But experience alone is not a sufficient guide, it needs to be supplemented by the thought of need.* Merely to ask for yesterday back again might show a grave misunderstanding of to-day. For life does change its face, and brings conditions we had never dreamed of; and if we ask for nothing but what we have had, we may be like Arctic travellers pushing south into new zones of weather, but sticking obstinately to the furs which served them on the ice-fields. "The God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob"—it is a glorious record; but to-day we are in the brick-fields, under the lash, our natures growing baser through base uses, whilst sullenness and revenge corrode our spirits. Some new gift is surely needed. Experience may assure us that God has much in store for men; but need, imperious and individual, must come in to teach us what to pray for.

This matching of hope with need is always clear in the temper of the Hebrew prophets. They were convinced that in God's fullness there was provision for every need which could arise, and therefore, in picturing the Coming One, they did not simply repeat the dreams and demands of those who had gone before. To-day has its rights as much as yesterday, they felt; and God, who cares for us and who sees the differences between day and day, will meet the new necessities. So whilst they all looked for a Coming One, they did not all

conceive Him with the same features or the same offices. In days of misrule He was appealed to as the righteous Judge; in days of foreign oppression He was looked to as Conqueror and Deliverer; when the channels of communication were clogged, they conceived of Him as a Prophet like Moses, one of themselves. But in each case they set their expectation in the line of their necessity: need instructed them what they should pray for. In the 110th Psalm the Coming One is figured as a *Priest* as well as a King, for to the great heart of that poet no lack seemed half so bitter as the lack of access. The priests he knew had little help to offer to a man aware of his remoteness; they were mere temple officials, drilled in the discharge of the etiquette of their business. So to God he looked past them for the gift of a true Priest.

We must be not less bold in making our requests match our needs. God has not made all times or all men after one pattern. He might have fashioned creatures fairer or more gifted than we; but something in our peculiarity tempted Him, and we are here with needs and cravings all our own. "The heart knows its own bitterness, and a stranger intermeddleth not with its joy." Even when we have companions in distress, each is yet conscious of something distinctive in his conditions; and therefore, if we are wise, we shall never be content with borrowed petitions which might be used alike by anybody. Rather we ought to say, "Here, Lord, is this trouble which is making life hard for me, reveal Thyself

in it for Thy name's sake. Give me, not anybody's grace, but that which meets my own condition." This may sound audacious, but it is an audacity which the very name of God—"I will be"—encourages.

A wise Jewish teacher of our own generation attributes much of the disappointment attaching to the Synagogue worship to failures just at this point: "We love God," he says, "not with our own hearts but with our fathers' hearts." That is to say—we use their petitions, and look for their blessings, and even imitate their tones, as if this were not a new age with puzzles and oppressions of its own, in which God will certainly reveal Himself afresh for our strengthening, and surprise us by the timeliness of His gift. For He is able to make all grace to abound in *all* our need. He makes even the darkness His secret place, it is said, for no necessity can bar Him out from the life of His creatures.

III. But experience and need, even when taken together, do not exhaust the fullness of God, and we must call in *faith* to guide us in our prayer, for He is able to do exceeding abundantly above what we ask or think.

Paul strains the resource of his vocabulary, inventing words, doing violence to grammar, heaping comparatives upon superlatives in order to express the amazements he had seen in Christ, but still the fact outgoes him. Of the common Christian Gospel he declares that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, it hath not entered into the

heart of a man to conceive the things which God has prepared for them that love Him"; for as he looked more closely into it, that Gospel seemed ampler and more astounding than he had supposed. "To me it was granted as a favour that among the nations I should proclaim the glad tidings of the untracked riches of Christ." In presence of that fullness, which is our possession also, Paul felt himself like some explorer who has landed here or there on the shores of a rich continent, and from a near hill-top has gazed out over forest and prairie to mountains packed with treasure; "*The untracked riches of Christ.*" And Paul's Christ is our Christ also, so we are not meant to be hampered in our expectations. He who rightly knows the Lord is like one swimming in the mid-Atlantic, far beyond the fear of striking a hand against the shore of either coast. There is room in Christ for wide expansions, and therefore in thought and prayer we must always keep an ample margin. Much of God's wonder has reached us by report, and there is much which our urgent needs suggest; but beyond both there lie still mightier things, and in our petitions we must leave room for the unexpected. There are duties unattempted, promises unexplored, comforts unimagined, victories undreamed of, and thus, in its form, the redemptive Name is left vague and uncompleted. That He will be is declared, but *what* He will be is unexpressed. "It is a great silence, with contents immeasurable, blessedness unspeakable; for what else can He be than God?"

In good days and in evil, in work and in weakness, in prosperity and in fear—He will yet more fully declare Himself. For He, the Lord, has said, "I will not leave you comfortless, I will come unto you."

Brethren, having such a God we do not lose heart. In the name of our God we shake out our banners and we face the coming days with hope.

XII

NOT BONDMEN BUT SONS

H. R. Mackintosh, D.D., D.Phil.

"Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father."—Romans viii. 15.

Many people are dimly conscious of a lack somewhere in their religious life, which is unaccountable to themselves. The fact is a grief to them, as well as a perplexity, yet there it is with a growing weight. Instead of religion curing all their cares, it proves only a new burden, perhaps the weariest burden of them all. Instead of healing other failures, it is the department in which they fail most frequently. Everything in the Bible stimulates the hope that religion will bring new life, power, confidence, joy; but to them it appears to bring only a sadder sense of weakness and troubled doubt.

It is actually possible, then, to be the Father's child, yet live on in the spirit of bondage. It is possible to belong to God's family, while we continue to have the feelings of the outsider. Would some of us here confess this, if we were talking quietly to a trusted friend? Of course, if we

are Christians at all, the thought of God is a happy thought for us; but is it always so instinctively or at once? Does it there and then fill us with peace and joy? Or is it not often the case that to remember Him is in a real measure to be alarmed, not quieted; saddened, not gladdened; paralyzed, not empowered? If it be so, small wonder that even Christian hearts should be visited by an atmosphere of foreboding, doubt and care—in short, the spirit of bondage not of sonship.

Let us try to get hold of the needed corrective which this text puts in our hand. It declares that despondency and gloom are out of place in hearts to which Christ has spoken. There is money in Chancery waiting for the rightful heirs; and if we have hoped in Jesus, we are the heirs of God, and blessings are there for us, of peace and courage, waiting to be taken. There is a continual temptation to question it, no doubt. We are tempted to regard that liberty of soul as a close privilege reserved for a special inner circle; it looks like a remote and all but inaccessible height to be scaled by an adventurous spirit here or there, but not really for people like ourselves. When Christ's love is offered in its fullness, we incline to accept a very little, then turn away mistrustfully: "such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain to it." So we fail to meet God in the spirit in which He comes to us. We refuse to drink because we are so thirsty, or to eat because we are faint with hunger. Yet all the time, as we know perfectly, the only right thing, the only

thing that is sincere and wise and that will bear being looked back upon, is to take the Father at His word. We are not subjects of His merely, He tells us, or His pupils, or even His guests; we are His children—dear to His heart, never out of His mind, ransomed at a great cost. Let us for a moment consider this fact and its implications, as our text may guide us.

Note, first of all, the contrast of these two types of spirit—bondage and sonship. The chief symptom of bondage is fear; of sonship the mark is child-like prayer.

You and I can scarcely believe how crushing the blank sense of fear was in that old pagan world into which the Gospel burst. There was nothing men of that age needed so much to be saved from as just the sickening and stupefying dread of things. Life was hemmed round with darkness, and the darkness was full of devils. To understand what that signifies for human life, you need only talk to a modern missionary. He is up against the same phenomenon. It is pretty safe to say that at this moment the dark pall which hangs over every heathen soul in Africa—the great background of existence—is fear: fear of nature, fear of man, fear of God. And, what is the most pathetic feature of all, the terror at its worst is purely religious. Constantly the near approach of the divine is felt as a danger too awful to be endured, for the divine and the diabolical are much the same. It is easy enough for us, gathered here under the shadow of the Cross, to find it nearly incredible

that men should be so afraid, so panic-stricken, so unnerved by unknown mysterious dangers; but to the expert it is the merest commonplace. And if we have escaped these haunting terrors which once filled the world, it is not because we are so strong-minded, or such powerful reasoners; it is because God came close beside us in Jesus, and we knew Him as our Friend.

If we have escaped—but then, have we? We may no longer believe in unclean and malicious spirits continually waiting to seize upon and ruin us; that phase may have vanished. But even as we sit here in Church, are there not some amongst us whose outlook is overlaid darkly with fear, in the most varied forms? Fear perhaps of our own passions; the consequences of sin; the cloud of financial trouble; danger to our children; the failure of bodily powers; the loneliness of life; an impending operation—anything at all it may be, which can enter these hearts of ours and make us afraid. As was said the other day: "There are men and women in plenty whose lives are fettered and their moral energies imprisoned by an undefined but haunting fear. They are afraid of life and afraid of death; they are even half afraid of themselves." I would ask you to note that this at bottom is a matter of religion. These fears flow from our wrong thought of God, and in turn they disturb and poison our relations with God. If our sense of God were different, the fear would die; and if it were dead, how near we might live to Him!

Fear in religious men has two roots mainly. It

may spring, in the first place, from doubt of God's love. It is the easiest thing to drift into the impression that God loves us in direct proportion to our goodness. Hence when we fail or wander or forget, that means we instantly suppose that His love is blotted out. We toil through duty lest we should forfeit His compassion; we strive to obey, in the hope that He will treat us kindly; like children, we make spasmodic efforts to be good, and so have Him love us. We must persuade Him to be our Father. But is not the New Testament there all the time to tell us this is a pure mistake? From the first the persuasion has all been on His side. He invariably takes the first step. What else does revelation mean? What are Christ and His salvation for, and all the patient faithfulness that has guided us since first we listened to His voice but just to prove that we belong to Him and can claim Him, not because we are worthy, but because His love has given us all we need? And for all that do you know what return He is seeking? Just that you should believe it. Nothing more than that you should take and keep it as a warm, irradiating conviction in the heart, and let it work there day by day. Then you will be obedient, not that He may make you His child, but through the glad revolutionizing knowledge that you are His child, and that His mercy never ends. The sight of His love casts out fear.

Now this strikes some people as presumption. They regard it as wiser and much more humble not to be too sure even of something God has made

quite clear. At most they would say, "Well, I hope, I *hope*, I am a child of God;" and they do not much care to hear anybody else go further than that. But that is not the Bible's way. Think of that greatest of all texts on this subject, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us, that we should be called the sons of God." At the close of that verse we now have in the Revised Version the well-authenticated addition: "and such we are." That is a sort of rapid aside, striking the note of personal assurance. It echoes from earth the name "sons" spoken from heaven. "Such we are"—yes, such *we* are, notwithstanding failures and stains and wrong-doings, in all our hardship or monotonous drudgery; "sons of God we are," if God declares it. And when a man receives a declaration of that kind with mere humble-sounding protests that he is not worthy, then all you can say is that he is thinking far too much about himself, and what is best for him is that he should forget all about worthiness or its opposite, and show the filial spirit of confidence by responding to the name by which God calls him. We never can trust Him too completely. We never can be too sure that for Him to say this or that makes an end of the matter for good and all. So, when He stoops down and you hear Him say, "Son, thou art ever with Me, and all that I have is Thine," do not put it away from you as too good to be true, but take it with both hands, thankfully, and refuse to let it go.

Or again, fear may spring from doubt of God's

power. It is very widespread at this moment. Men are swept away by dread, feeling themselves in the grip of ruthless and inscrutable forces, against which it is vain to strive—forces that produce famine, war, disease, shipwreck, death. Does the sway of God's control extend over these ? I am quite sure that the secret of victory here, too, is not hard thinking, but a deeper faith generated by living in Jesus' company. A child may decline to jump from a burning house at the word of a stranger, but she will make the venture when her father holds out his arms. We are afraid of life only when we suspect all things are against us, and that the Unknown is full of terrors ; but if we know that God in Christ is Father and that He is almighty, the fear will subside. Has there ever been one so masterfully triumphant over cowardice as Jesus, and has there ever been a life like His of deep, unbroken Sonship ? The Sonship was the unseen cause of the courage, or rather the courage was but the outer side of the fabric, of the conscious Sonship within. " I am not alone, for the Father is with Me." And you and I, brethren, though at the long interval between Redeemer and redeemed, can be delivered from haunting fears through all that Christ has been and is, and in the strength of that filial spirit granted us when we lay hold of Him. When like Him, and in His name, we place all life in the Father's hand, when in His presence we open our hearts to the bracing call, " Be of good cheer, it is I ; be not afraid," then the black pall of uncertainty is lifted off,

and we breathe freely. Fear has torment, but perfect love casts it out.

Note, secondly, some implications of this sonship for daily living.

For one thing, the thought of sonship imparts a new meaning to life as a whole. There are secrets which will always be secrets till you try this key. There are melodies which the chords of experience will yield only to fingers that possess this touch. No man can persist in quarrelling with fortune and abusing fate who knows that God has called him son, and that the world is part of the Father's house. It is impossible to go on whispering suspicion to ourselves, or asking whether or not life is worth living, if we have once grasped the biggest, grandest truth ever offered to the human mind. Let me put the question Thomas Erskine put to the solitary shepherd on the hills one autumn, and to which a year later he got an affirmative answer: "Do you know the Father?" Can you look up and say: Thou art mine, and I belong to Thee? That makes everything new. The very woods and lakes will be more lovely for you, when that song is in your heart.

"Heaven above is softer blue,
Earth around is sweeter green,
Something lives in every hue,
Christless eyes have never seen.
Birds with gladder songs o'erflow,
Flowers with deeper beauties shine,
Since I know, as *now* I know,
I am His, and He is mine."

Again, sonship is a pledge of personal goodness. Jesus once began by saying, "Be ye perfect"; and if He had stopped there, we should have despaired. Perfect—we find it hard enough to be respectable! But, as you remember, He went on: "As your Father is perfect," and that makes all the difference. If God is Father, why, then, like other fathers, He will help us. He will bear with failure that He may nurse us back to victory. He will make us holy, not that He may love us, but for the reason that He loves us now. He will value our poor beginnings. I have seen a child pluck a daisy from the lawn and bring it, stumbling, to his mother as though it were some rare exotic flower; but I did not observe that she made light of it, or flung it away in scorn; no, she pinned it on her breast to wear. How like God that is! It is dear in His sight when a man does what he can. No work so cheerless as trying to *earn* the love we need; but to work out from sonship in Christ as our starting-point and our source of power at every moment—there is the secret that opens the gates of attainment and self-control.

Then, again, think how sonship casts light on the great hereafter. The Gospel would be no Gospel at all unless it flung its beam right across the black, gaping gulf of death, and lit up enough of the new world concealed there to show that it is a home. Yes, a *home*; because dwelt in and pervaded by God. There is always a home where there is a father. When Jesus came to die and was speaking to the Twelve, that last night, of

what lay before Him, how did He describe the future? Did He talk of it with bated breath or tremulous uncertainty? Did He fall into anything even remotely similar to that strange habit of speech common even among good people when they refer to a Christian who has passed forward as "poor So-and-So"? Very far otherwise. He perceived how the men beside Him were sunk in grief, and to cheer them He said, "If ye loved Me ye would rejoice." Why? "Because I go to the Father." And again, later in the same talk, "A little while, and ye shall see Me, because—I go to the Father." This is what our Forerunner saw: death is going to the Father. Well, then, the fact which He so clearly saw, we by His help can look through His eyes and see for ourselves. To grasp the Father who touches and blesses us in Christ—that of itself gives faith in immortality. Strength for that untrodden journey comes only from the grasp, which may tremble but does not slacken, of the Father's hand here and now. "I am continually with Thee; Thou wilt guide me with Thy counsel and afterward receive me to glory." When God's will for you here is ended, and you depart, you will have to say farewell to many things—to familiar scenes, to treasured objects, even for a time to beloved friends. But never, never, if you know Him, will you have to say farewell to God your Saviour. "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me."

Finally, sonship gives a new and deeper sense to

prayer. That, you will note, is a point the apostle particularly touches upon. "The spirit of sonship," he writes, "whereby we cry, Abba, Father." He means that we cry thus to God in emergencies of stress and pain. "Abba, Father"—we seem to have heard these words before. Are they not an echo of something familiar? Yes: in the Garden of Gethsemane, was it not? They were first uttered in that hour when Christ fell on the ground and prayed, "Abba, Father, take away this cup; nevertheless not what I will, but what Thou wilt." Sonship was there, but also pain and struggle: struggle and pain was there, yet the spirit of sonship reigned over all, and Christ went on with fearless eyes to the Cross awaiting Him. So, too, it may be with us. Even when the billows are going over us, the sense of belonging to God can hold us up. Though in ignorance and weakness, like children in the dark, our hearts are troubled, still if we cry with no bated or hesitating breath, "Father, Father," the presence we long for will calm the fear. Just as we wake in the night, and look out, and see the stars, and know that while we slept and when we sleep again, their shining eyes look down; so also it is with that unsleeping Lord to whom our prayers rise.

So let me leave this question on your hearts, as I would strive to do on my own: Are we not mysteriously unwilling, in spite of all that we know of Christ, to believe that God is love, and that He is our Father? Do we not cling strangely to our fears? There was a time when men sur-

mised that if the great Nile were tracked up to its fountainhead, its origin might prove to be some tiny spring, some scanty nameless rivulet. But when explorers pierced the secret, it was to find that the river sprang from a vast inland sea, sweeping with unbroken horizon round the whole compass of the sky. And we, too, are ready with our fears lest the river of life and salvation that streams past our doors, and into which we have dipped our vessels, if followed back to its farthest source, might rise in some grudging and uncertain store. But in truth the Father's mercy is like that great inland sea in the continent's heart, from which the river breaks full and brimming at its birth. It is from everlasting to everlasting. I ask you to rise up and claim it for your own. Let it daily fill your heart and garrison the inward life with peace.

"Trust in the Lord, for ever trust,
And banish all your fears;
Strength in the Lord Jehovah dwells,
Eternal as His years."

XIII

THE FAITH OF JESUS

JAMES MOFFATT, D.D., D.Litt.

"Let us run with patience the race that is set before us; looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith."—HEBREWS xii. 1, 2.

"LET us run . . . looking," says the apostle. A strange word! "Let us run *looking*?" But this is really the source of all movement in life. Motive-power always depends upon the direction of the mind and heart. "The world is forwarded," says Matthew Arnold, "by having its attention fixed on the best things." What keeps people up and urges them forward along any line of advance is the inward aim. When by strength of purpose we keep to some course without flagging, when we renounce this and hold to that, when we take a certain line amid the various openings and opportunities of the world, it means that we have set our minds upon a particular end. We are always seeing that end; it comes up before us at the cross-roads or among the dust of the beaten track. Other people may not see it, or see it as we do; but because we realize it, as we possess this vision and conviction of what we judge is

our true end, we hold to our course and make progress.

That is true of any calling or sphere, social or political, but it is tenfold true of our religious experience. Here, above all, it is the quality of our inward vision and the amount of insight we possess that lend us energy and inspire us with endurance. "We run." For faith is not drifting with the tide of current practice and opinion; it is a course directed by our sense of God, and especially by our sense of the will of God for us in Jesus Christ. "Let us run, looking unto Jesus." Why? Because Jesus ran our race. He, too, had to live by faith, as we are called to do. Our English version describes Him as "the author and finisher of our faith," but the word "our" is in italics, and what the apostle meant was that Jesus is "the pioneer and perfection of faith." He gives us a lead in the matter of faith, and we are to look to Him as the great Believer. He is our leader and pioneer in this kind of life, which follows the will of God, for He began the life of faith at its very beginning and carried it through to the end. He has left us a perfect pattern of what faith is and does. Part of His divine message to us lies in the fact that He too had to exercise faith in His human life, to "learn obedience by the things that He suffered," to look up to God for direction and guidance at critical moments, and to pray for aid in temptation. Jesus is the inspiration and example of faith. If you and I are to know anything about faith, from beginning to end, we must

look to Jesus who held faith in spite of appearances and worked it out triumphantly. Whenever the pace of the Church or of the individual has slackened, whenever there has been any abatement of zeal and vigour in Christianity, it has been due to the fact that for some reason or other there has been a failure to realize the faith of Jesus and to give Him the central place in our conception of religion.

What is faith? Belief in God and in some promise of God which is to be worked out in our experience. Now Jesus began His life on earth in the faith that He was the well-beloved Son of the Father. He had heard God assure Him of this vocation, and He ventured to hold fast to it, in spite of everything. He thought and spoke and acted by this faith in the divine word of promise. He died rather than give it up. And the same quality of tenacity is to mark our faith, whatever discouragements we have to encounter. Faith is the assurance that God has spoken to us, and that He will make His promise good, if we leave Him free to deal with us. Faith is the conviction that we belong to Another, not to ourselves, that we are here for some end of God, that we are not made in vain. When we believe, we trust that God has a future and a hope for us. What it will be we do not as yet clearly see, but we believe Him when He assures us that our life is to have a meaning and that He will unfold that meaning. It is a faith which never can be held without an effort to discount appearances

to the contrary. And I wish to speak briefly of some of the practical difficulties which meet this line of life, and which have been already met by Jesus Himself.

I. There is the difficulty of delay to begin with. To wait is always one of the trials of faith, and it is most trying because it often meets us at the beginning, when we are young and naturally impatient. Hope deferred makes people sick at heart and never more so than when they are under thirty. We may commit ourselves to faith as the true method of life. We may believe God is, God is good. We leave ourselves to Him, and let Him take us in hand. But for a time it seems as if nothing happened. It is so slow of coming, our chance of a place, that we may be tempted to imagine that God has somehow overlooked us altogether. Many men and women find this period of waiting extremely irksome. They feel that life is passing, and they do not see how its hopes are going to be fulfilled. They are conscious of powers vaguely stirring within them; they are eager for a career, for some opportunity of service, for independence, for love; they think they have a right to these in God's bright, breathing world, and a right to them now. Yet the doors do not always open. And it is hard, perhaps as hard as anything in the life of faith, to hope against hope, to wait bravely for the fulfilment of God's word in face of an experience that seems to mock it. No one who has had to pass through the ordeal of waiting, with desires repressed and

ambitions thwarted for a time, will ever speak lightly of it. Some people really lose their faith here before it goes any further; and many more lose something of the vitality which throbs in faith.

Yet, look at Jesus. Think how He was tried along this very line. From the age of about twelve to the age of about thirty, He too had to wait. During these years of which we know nothing, years that would correspond to the most stirring and ardent in human experience, He was apparently left to Himself at Nazareth. No one seemed to need Him. He must have been conscious of His destiny, and yet He was assigned the humble lot of a provincial carpenter, never known beyond His little village, watching the years pass by, and hearing no voice from heaven summoning Him to larger work and business for the Father. We often forget these eighteen years in the life of Jesus, and what they must have meant for Him. And yet it was during these dragging years that our Lord was winning His first fight of faith, against the temptations of delay. So, if any of you are on the threshold of life, still waiting for some opportunity of wider service, still passed over, apparently, and not yet called to step forward, look to Jesus, and do not grow impatient with God. Don't gird at circumstances. Never imagine that you had better take life back into your own hands. This is one of the places where you can learn the priceless lesson of self-command. If you are ever to be entrusted afterwards with any responsibility and called upon

to give a lead to other people, it will be only as you have first learned how to obey and possess your souls in patience. Remember that Jesus went before you on this hard path. Look at Him, at His brave patience in the discipline of early obscurity, and you will be less likely to grow dispirited.

II. Then there is the temptation of disappointment. When the openings do come, when we start to work out the life that God sets before us, it may bring acute disappointments which test the nerve of faith. Some never get the recognition to which they thought themselves legitimately entitled. Others fail to answer the hopes entertained of them by their friends. The handicap of bad health or of uncongenial surroundings may fall on life, and a first flush of success may be followed by a failure, or by what seems a failure in the eyes of men. There are many such ways in which our faith in God encounters trying experiences in the middle part of life. If we are not careful, they will set up bitter feelings or produce a dull melancholy which saps the spirit of confidence in God's good purpose, for when people reach a certain point in life they recognize their limitations and are forced to admit that some hopes are beyond their reach. Besides, responsibilities press on them, disillusionments undermine their zest in life, and they are disappointed in others as well as in themselves. Nothing is more common then, in the lives of many people, than to find thwarted hopes producing a spirit

of resentment against God, or at any rate a spirit of apathy.

Now, Jesus knew something of this temptation also. When He was at last called forward to His mission, the nation failed to answer His appeal. At first, indeed, popularity flowed to Him. It was roses, roses all the way, thousands from every part of the country thronging to Him. Apparently He had the nation in His hands. But soon His searching message proved too much for them. The early popularity waned, until He was left with a mere handful of adherents. His very life was in danger; He was suspected of heresy, denounced, and opposed on all hands. Yet He never lost His faith in God. With unwavering confidence He clung to the will of God for the world, believing to see the goodness of God in the land of the living. Jesus, in fact, resisted the temptation of the middle part of life, the temptation to repine, to make our personal feelings the first thing, to brood over what we have lost. And there are men and women for whom also God's work has been thus revived in the midst of the years. We know something of what they have had to suffer in their prospects or in their families. But we never find bitter smoke rising from their lives. On the contrary, they are bright and unselfish and interested in things about them, just because they have won their fight with this particular temptation. Do as they do, look to Jesus. Never pity yourselves. Self-pity is the most dangerous drug to take, when disappoint-

ments come. Never let yourselves dwell on lost chances or opportunities that will not return to you.

" Canst thou, thy pride forgot, like Nature pass
Into the winter night's extinguished mood ?
Canst thou shine now, then darkle,
And being latent feel thyself no less ? "

It is a fine test of life. And the best way for us to meet these temptations to grow cynical and inactive, the surest help against the pressure of the middle part of life, is to look to Jesus who Himself passed through the ordeal in front of us. Even out of these troubles and trials God can make materials for faith. He can use them to make us more thoughtful, more humble, and more sympathetic. And as we acquire these qualities, we are advancing steadily in all that faith means for a fruitful life.

III. Then, towards the end, there is the difficulty of death. For, however good life may have been, however full of opportunities and inspiration, still life is short. At the best it is an easily measured quantity, and often it is prematurely cut short by accident or disease. It would be morbid to be thinking of this often, for life not death is our concern. But sometimes a thoughtful person must face the fact. When you insure your life, for example, you are told the number of years upon which normally you are entitled to count. At a death in your family, you are reminded again of the brevity of your days. Death, you realize,

defeats many a plan and purpose. And the question rises for faith: Does death defeat everything? Does it defeat even what God purposes in us? The answer of faith is, "No." When we reduce the question to its simplest elements, it comes to this: "What is the last reality in the world? Is it God or death? Which of these two powers is the stronger?" Faith tries to answer, sometimes with a tremor in its voice, "God! It must be God." In the earlier days of Israel, no doubt, men did not realize all that was meant in the promise, "I will be thy God." But Jesus came, and ever since then it has been clear that this promise involved immortality. For Jesus laid down His life, believing that God would give it back to Him in glory everlasting. And God did not disappoint His faith. He met death in faith, and faith was justified.

We read that it had been revealed to Simeon of old that he should not see death till he had seen the Lord's Christ. And that revelation is made to us. We get our vision, our revelation of what Jesus is; then, in the light of that, we can see death truly without exaggerating it. This is the order of experience. First, the conception of all that Jesus means for life; then the sight and experience of death. How real death is, we know. It strips and empties life for us repeatedly. But, as we see Jesus, we know that the most real thing in this world or in any other is the faith which holds to God as Jesus held, and so we learn to take death in its true proportions. To meet it is the

last act of faith by which we shall be called upon to honour God. More people, even in the Church, are afraid of death than is commonly imagined. Some are all their life in bondage to this fear, ashamed to admit it perhaps, as if it were a weakness. But many strong Christians have suffered from this fear, men like Dr Johnson, for example, It is partly constitutional, partly due to certain physical conditions. Only, it is the experience of most doctors, nurses, and ministers, that the fear of death is not at all common on a deathbed. That may be some comfort to you. Perhaps God mercifully deadens the senses; perhaps He draws out unsuspected resources of courage, when the actual experience has to be faced. But anyhow the fact remains. And this further help is for us, that Jesus Himself encountered the same temptation. He knew the natural shrinking from death. He had to pass through the haunting recoil from bodily collapse which many of us hate and fear. Where He went we can follow, and follow safely, as we look to Him. What we have to face here He once faced.

Now, it is to sustain this faith that we are called to the worship of the Church. Life is difficult for us, and faith sometimes is difficult too. It never can be more difficult for us than it was for Jesus our Lord. But He believed in God, and He gathers us in our fellowship to strengthen faith. "Let us run the race set before us, looking to Him." When we look at things round us, there is much to discourage faith. What we see

and hear in the world is often enough to take the heart out of any belief in God or in ourselves or in human nature. But we meet here to look to Jesus, catching His spirit for life, and He always revives our confidence. There is not a word that ever fell from His lips suggesting uncertainty or doubt. We see nothing in Him that does not encourage us to believe, nothing that does not make us ashamed of being listless or doubting God. We catch from Him the impetus that sends us forward with new heart and hope, nerving us to believe steadily in God and goodness, to the saving of our souls. You may be here, facing delays or disappointments or even the subtle fear of death. Well, but He is here to show you what faith in a living God can do for you. He is here to help you as none else can do, to begin, to continue, and to end, in the faith that overcomes the world.

XIV

THE COMMENDATION OF GOD'S LOVE

GEORGE H. MORRISON, D.D.

"God commendeth His love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."—ROMANS v. 8.

IN our text we are brought face to face with the Cross of Calvary, and we see that Cross standing in a light that glorifies it. That great transaction on Calvary may be viewed in many aspects, but perhaps the aspect in our text is the most sublime of all. Just as the Cross itself, which stood upon the hill, was touched with new and ever-varying glories, as the lights and shadows of the setting sun lingered for a moment on its bars, so to the eye of faith new glories fall upon the Crucifixion, under the light of a Sun that never sets. When God sends forth His light we see the Cross as the master work of grace. We see the Cross as the gateway into peace. We see the Cross as the type of self-denial. Over and above all that we see the Cross as the one triumphant argument for the love of God. "God commendeth His love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." What is it to commend? It is far more than to recommend.

It is to exhibit, to demonstrate, to prove. This, then, must textually be our theme to-day, the Cross of Calvary viewed as the unanswerable proof of the love of God. First, I shall ask the need that this love should be commended thus. And, secondly, the nature of the love that is thus commended.

I. Firstly—*The need that the love of God should be commended thus.* There are some attributes of God that need no proof. Some features of the Divine character there are, so universally conspicuous as to be self-evidencing. Think, for example, of God's *power*. If we believe in God at all we need no argument to convince us of His power. The mighty forces that engirdle us all cry aloud of that. The chambers of the deep, the chariot of the sun, are stamped with it. The devastating march of winter's storm, and, none the less, the timely calling of all the summer's beauty out of the bare earth, these things, and a thousand other things like these, teach us the power of God. We would not need the Cross if all that had to be proved was the Divine omnipotence. Or take the *wisdom* of God. Is any argument needed to assure us in general of that? None. "Day unto day uttereth speech of it, and night unto night showeth forth its glory." Our bodies, so fearfully and so wonderfully made; our senses, linking us so strangely to the world without; our thought, so swift, so incomprehensible; and all the constancy of Nature, and all the harmony of part with part, and all the

obedience of the starry worlds, and all the perfections of the wayside weed; these things, and a multitude of things like these, speak to the thinking mind of the wisdom of the God with whom we have to do. That wisdom needs no formal proof. It is self-evidencing. We would not need the Cross if all that had to be proved was the wisdom of God.

Now, brethren, there are not a few who think that the love of God is like His wisdom and His power. Perhaps I should not say they think it, for such a view was never held by a thinking mind. It would be more true, if I said that there are multitudes who vaguely hold that God is love, and never dream that such a statement calls for some strong argument to prove it. I wish to tell you that that is not the Bible standpoint. I wish to tell you that a shallow optimism like that must ever be rejected by the thinker. The love of God is not self-evident. It is not stamped upon creation like His power. It is not written on the nightly heavens like His wisdom. Nay, on the contrary, if it be a fact, it is a fact against which a thousand other facts are fighting. And if in that love I am to believe, some proof of it, some argument I must have, strong enough to put these thousand militating facts to flight.

Let me mention one or two of these things that have made it hard for men to believe in the love of God. One is the tremendous struggle for existence that is ceaselessly waged

among all living things. Man fights with man, and beast with beast; bird fights with bird, and fish with fish. To the seeing eye the world is all a battlefield, and every living creature in it is in arms, and fighting for its life. The watchword of Nature is not peace, but war. The calmest summer evening, to him who knows old Nature's story, is only calm as the battlefield is calm where multitudes lie dead. Under that outward peace which oftentimes, like a mantle seems to enwrap the world, by night and day, on sea and land, the bloodiest of wars is being waged. Creature, merciless and venomous, preys upon creature. For right to live, for room to grow, for food to eat, in grim and fearful silence the awful war goes on. Sir, can you wonder that men who have known all that, and nothing more than that, have ceased to believe in the love of God? Can you marvel that he who has no other argument for God's love than what Nature gives him, rejects as mockery the thought of the Divine compassion? Nature groaning and travailing in pain together seems to cry out against the love of God. And in the hearing of these groans, clearer to us to-day than in any past age, only an argument of overwhelming force will convince the heart that God is love.

Or think again. There are the problems of human pain and sorrow and bereavement. Is it not very hard to reconcile these darker shadows with the light of heavenly love? What is the meaning of that suffering that seemed to fall so

causelessly on her you loved? Can God be love, and never move a finger to ease your little child when he is screaming day and night in fearful agony? Ah! sir, you have had such thoughts as that. Confess them. When in the sudden squall the flower of our fishermen are drowned; when from your arms your dearest joy is torn away; when those who would not harm a living creature are bowed for years under intolerable pain, and when the wicked or the coarse seem to get all they wish, who has not cried, "Can God be love if He permits all this? How can God say He loves me, and yet deal with me as I could never have the heart to deal with one I loved?"

Brethren, it is such facts as these that make it so hard for many to credit the love of God. It is the experiences of which these are but a sample that call for some unanswerable proof if we are to believe that God is love. And it is that proof which is afforded us in the Crucifixion of Christ Jesus. "God commendeth His love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." The one triumphant argument for the love of God is seen in the Cross of Jesus. The story of Nature may seem to tell against this truth that every heart hungers to believe. And the experiences of life may often seem to fight against it too. But as we read the story of that atoning death, all doubts are overborne. Nothing but love, love wonderful, love matchless, will explain the Cross. When we have gazed in faith upon the Cross of Christ, we never can seriously doubt

the love of God again. I do not mean that difficulties vanish. I do not say that problems disappear. Much that was dark before remains dark still; but now we bow the head and say we know in part, and with patience wait to be satisfied in the morning. We can be ignorant and dark and even fretful still, but we can never doubt the love of God again. For with overwhelming power God has convinced us of His love, "in that while we are yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Again, observe that this great proof of God's love is a fact and not a word or theory. Love must be proved by deeds and not by words. The loudest protestations may be empty. No mere profession of the lip will ever satisfy the heart that longs to know another's love. Love's argument is service. Love's commendation lies in sacrifice. The self-forgetful service of the lover wins, as the warmest passion never would. And the proof of deeds is needed above all, when by the proof of deeds love seems disproved. If you or I by any act suspect that we are hated, it is not any word, however warm, will ever blot that suspicion out. It is only some deed of love, clear, unmistakable, that will have power to do that. See, then, the wisdom of our God. It is the facts of nature and of life, of history and of experience, that make it so hard to believe His love. He knows it all, and so the proof He offers of His love is a fact too. Facts must be met by facts. And all the dark facts in the world's story. God overwhelms by the great fact of Calvary. Yes,

God so loved the world, not that He said or thought, but that He gave. Thanks be to Him for that. I read the loving promises in many of the prophets. I read the passionate language of the bridegroom in the Song of Songs. And all the time this doubting heart keeps whispering, "These are but words; these are but words." Come, thank thy God, my heart, that not in these alone, not in these chiefly, He has commended His love to thee. And now I turn to the atoning death of Jesus on the Cross. Here is no word. Here is no empty protestation. Here is a deed tremendous, matchless, irresistible, and every opposing argument is silenced. Looking at Calvary I hear the Lord say, "Come, let us reason together, do I not love thee?" Yes, Lord, I have reasoned with Thee. I have marshalled all my arguments and all my facts, and I am here to confess to-day that by the fact of Calvary Thou hast won.

One other word before I leave this aspect of the case. I want you to observe that this proof is one of perpetual validity. The Bible does not say, God commended, it does not say, God has commended; it uses the perpetual present and says, God commendeth. There are some proofs for the being and attributes of God that serve their purpose, and then pass away. There are arguments that appeal to us in childhood, but lose their power in our maturer years. And there are proofs that may convince one generation, and yet be of little value to the next. Not a few evidences, such as that from design, which were

very helpful to you, believer of an older school, are well-nigh worthless to your thinking son, imbued with the teaching of the present day. But there is one argument that stands unshaken through every age and every generation. It is the triumphant argument of the Cross of Christ. Knowledge may widen, thought may deepen, theories may come and go; yet in the very centre, unshaken and unshakable, stands Calvary, the lasting commendation of the love of God. To all the sorrowing and to all the doubting, to all the bitter and to all the eager, to every youthful heart, noble and generous, to every weary heart, burdened and dark, to-day and here, as 1900 years ago to all like hearts in Rome, "God commendeth His love, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."

II. *What is the nature of the love that is commended thus.* "God commendeth His own love to us," so the text reads. What is the love, then, that is commended so? And here we must be textual. Wide as the Bible is the subject. All we can hope to find to-day is what the text tells us of this love.

Like life, love is of many kinds. There is a love that ennobles and casts a radiance upon life. There is a love that drags the lover down into the mouth of hell. There is a love that many waters cannot quench. There is a love that is disguised lust. What kind of love then is God's love proved to be from His commendation of it?

And first, splendidly visible is this, it is a love

that thought no sacrifice too great. The surest test of love is sacrifice. We measure love, as we should measure her twin-brother life, "by loss and not by gain, not by the wine drunk but by the wine poured forth." Look at the mother with her child. She sacrifices ease and sleep, and she would sacrifice life too for her little one, and she thinks nothing of it all, she loves her baby so. Think of the patriot and his country. He counts it joy to drain his dearest veins, he loves his land so well. Recall the scholar at his books. Amusements, intercourse and sleep, he almost spurns them. His love for learning is so deep he hardly counts them loss. Yes, in the willingness to sacrifice all that is dearest lies the measure of the noblest love.

Turn now to Calvary, turn to the Cross, and by the sight of the crucified Redeemer there, begin to learn the greatness of God's love. Come, who is this that hangs between two thieves with pierced hands and feet? And who is this whose back is wealed with scars, whose face is fouled with spittle? Yes, who is this the passers-by are mocking? See, He is sorrowful even unto death. Hark, He cries, "My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Wonder, O heavens, and be amazed, O earth, this is none other than God's only begotten Son. Did ever mother, did ever patriot, did ever human lover in the zeal of love make any sacrifice to be compared with that of God, when He gave His only begotten Son to shame and death that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish?

Ah! sir, measuring the love of God by such a test as this, we touch its height and depth and length and breadth, and then do we not cry out with Paul, "It passeth knowledge."

Again, I look at the love of God that our text speaks of, and now I see it is a love that never sprang from the sight of anything lovable in us. I suppose in this gathering to-day we have many loveless hearts. There are dead souls within this house of God to-day, all whose affections are slain. And yet I am sure of this, that in all this company there is not one heart but once has loved. Father or mother, son or daughter, husband or wife, once, if not now, you loved them. They were your heart's desire, to them your souls were knit.

Well, then, I want you now to recall that love again. I want you to try and trace it to its source. I want you to tell me whence it sprang. Was it the natural outflow of your heart, the welling over of your nature regardless of the person loved? Or was it not rather some excellence, or worth, or beauty, some charm that made an indefinable appeal, that caught and held the tendrils of your heart? Yes, it was that. It was all you saw, and all you knew, and all you conjured, that drew your love out. You loved and you loved only, because you found those worthy to be loved. And it is just here that, wide as the poles, God's love stands separated from all the love of men. "God commendeth His love, in

that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." God longs to love me into something lovable. But not for anything lovable in me did He love me first. While I was yet a sinner He loved me. While I hated Him He loved me. While I was fighting against Him in the rebellious years He loved me. If we love Him, it is because He first loved us. Such causeless love is wonderful, passing the love of women.

Again I turn to the love of God our text speaks of, and now I see it is a love splendid in its righteousness. Some of the saddest tragedies in human life spring from the moral weakness of the deepest love. Love is the mother of all tenderness, and tenderness shrinks instinctively from what is stern or rigorous. So love, from the excess of her fairest grace, often becomes the minister of ruin. How many a mother who would have laid her life down for her son, she loved him so, has only helped him down the road to ruin by the immoral weakness of her love. How many a father, to spare his own heart the bitter agony of punishing his child, has let his child grow up unchastened. Such love as that is fatal. Sooner or later it tarnishes the thought of fatherhood in the child's eyes. For in his views of fatherhood the child can find no place now for earnest hatred of the wrong, and passionate devotion to the right; and so the image of fatherhood is robbed of all its powers.

Brethren, I do not hesitate to say, that if out of the page of history you wipe the atoning death

on Calvary, you carry that tragedy of weakness into the very heavens. Blot out the Cross and I, a child of heaven, can never be uplifted and inspired by the thought of the Divine Fatherhood again. Yes, I have sinned, and know it. I deserve chastisement, and know it. And shall my Father never whisper a word of punishment? and never breathe His horror at my fall? And will He love me, and be kind to me right through it all without a word of warning? I tell you the moment I would believe *that*, the glory of the Divine Fatherhood is tarnished for me; God's perfect love of goodness and awful hatred of the wrong are dimmed; and all the impulse and enthusiasm these divine passions bring sink out of my life for ever. But when I turn to Calvary, and to that awful death I see a love as righteous as it is wonderful. Sin must be punished, although the Well-beloved has to die. And the divine anger at iniquity must be revealed, though the curse fall upon the Son of God. The awful sight of that atoning death assures me of the perfect righteousness of God in the very moment that it assures me of His love. I see the divine hatred of iniquity; I see the divine need that sin be punished; I see the divine sanction of everlasting law in the very glance that commends to me the everlasting love. And now with renewed trust I cast myself into the arms of that heavenly love. With heart and soul and strength and mind I accept it as it is commended to me upon the Cross. I live rejoicing in the Fatherhood

of God. I go to every task and every trial assured of this, that neither height, nor depth, nor life nor death, nor any other creature can separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, my Lord. Amen.

XV

PROVIDENCE

JAMES F. PADKIN.

"As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: so the Lord alone did lead him."—DEUT. xxxii. 11, 12.

Or,

"As an eagle (mother-bird) stirreth up her nest, broodeth over her young, and he (father-bird) spreadeth abroad his wings, taketh them and beareth them on his wings:

"So the Lord alone did lead him . . ."

IT is a commonplace remark that old people live in the past. It seems natural to the aged to dwell in conversation on the incidents that have befallen them; especially do we find that those persons who, like the statesman, have been concerned in public commotions, or, like the sailor, have experienced extraordinary dangers, dwell with a delight on the past, fighting again the battles and facing again the perils that are gone. And this disposition is as useful as it is natural. Through it many valuable instructions are conveyed to others; young people, for instance, who listen to the reminiscences of their elders, reap thereby the advantages of past experience and are taught what they may expect to meet with

in their own lives. This propensity to enlarge on life's changes is beneficial, especially when it is subservient to the purposes of godliness; when incidents are related in such a manner as to lead us into correct and helpful views of the providential government of God in human life, and to inspire us with grateful and trustful sentiments towards our Father in Heaven.

Now, in this text we have recorded the last words of the master-spirit of the Old Testament. Looking back upon the story of his own days, and upon the history of Israel, he sees the golden thread of Divine government running through the maze of events; and he sums up his impression of the method, which God followed in the leading of His folk, in this poetic saying: "As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, taketh them and beareth them on her wings; so the Lord alone did lead him." If, now, we look more closely at this passage, we see that Moses here gives us a threefold view of Providence. He shows us, first, that it is a disturbing force; secondly, that it has a progressive purpose; and, third, that it is a sustaining power.

I. *Providence is at times a disturbing force.*

These Israelites had had a long and grand past, and it was easy for them to believe in the Divine government as a whole. It is easy for us, when we stand out under the starry sky, to believe in the Divine Architect who shaped the universe. It is easy, when we look at the careers of great men like Luther, Milton, and Cromwell, to believe

in a Divinity that shapes the ends of our lives. It is not so difficult, either, to believe in the loving care that watches over ordinary people like ourselves in our quiet uneventful days. And so the general faith of Israel in the Providential guidance of their steps stood fast. But there was one element in their experience against which they were inclined to rebel, and that was the disturbing element of constant change. Imagine, for instance, the stir that must have been created in the camp when the word came, "Ye have dwelt long enough in this Mount." For it meant that the people, who had been living there for some eighteen months, were suddenly rooted up and ordered to move on. Think how this sudden proclamation would upset their family and social arrangements! What a disturbing business! And so, as they murmured, Moses bade them lift up their eyes to the eagles, and consider their loving dealing with their young. The picture to which he points is full of truth and beauty. Horeb rises before them, and on the edge of the rugged cliff is a rudely constructed nest of sticks. To this nest on the summit of the cliff the eaglets cling, afraid to trust their wings, and so to learn the use of their powers and to attain their fuller life. But the wiser parent-eagle, with stern kindness, drives them from their shelter: "She stirreth up the nest." Behold, in a moment, the refuge that the little ones loved is gone; they can no longer settle there; and so, perforce, they set forth on their life's adventure, cleaving the air amid the

sunny heights. And by this picture Moses seeks to illustrate the love of God that is at the heart of all the vicissitudes of His people's pilgrimage.

Now, see what God our Father is doing with us. He deals with us all through life as the eagle, in her love and wisdom, deals with her young. How often do our hearts, in their foolishness, fondly cling to the delusion that at some favoured Horeb we have all we require; and we are content to nestle there. How often do we hear people talking of "settling down"; as if that were the ultimate good. But the unseen hand of God is ever dealing with us, with loving severity, compelling us to go forth that we may develop the powers of our rising youth, or exercise the privilege of our divine sonship, or develop our souls in preparation for the future glory. As we look back we see, for example, how He stirred up the school-nest, so that we could not nestle there. School-days and school-companions, where are they? He has scattered our playmates over the face of the earth, and some have already reached the yonder shore. The happy band of laughing lads is scattered, the games are ended; and we are outside of that nest. Again, there was the nest of our early home. When we were children we never fancied, though we saw change come over other homes, that it would ever come to our own. It never dawned upon us that we should not have our father and mother always with us, and that our family circle would not remain unbroken. How short-sighted of us! Father or mother is gone;

perhaps both have passed away. It may even be that all our family circle are dispersed. Peradventure the walls of the old dwelling, in some lone glen, may be yielding to the hand of decay; or, if it is still standing, our shadow may never darken its threshold. Truly the nest is stirred up; it is destroyed; it is gone like a dream.

And, again, in later years, maybe, we choose a happy partner and make a home for ourselves. We fill this earthly nest with all manner of comforts; and then, we say, we will settle down. The husband is pleased with his business and its returns; and the wife with her comfortable home and her surroundings. They nestle in their comfort like birds in a warm nest. Sometimes, alas! in circumstances like these, the generous hopes and ideals of youth are lost; religion is forsaken; earnest benevolent work for Christ, the prayer-meeting and other such forms of Christian activity, come to be avoided as a leper would be in our street. Now, if death comes into such a home and writes paleness on some cheeks of roses there, do you wonder? Do you marvel that God disturbs such lives in order to stir them up to thoughts of better things? Such are some of the more common ways in which the unsettling power of God is made manifest in human affairs.

But you can look into your own experience and see what deeper and more revolutionary changes there have been in it. For God comes into every life, not only in such ordinary ways as we have noted, but in many a strange, mysterious guise,

severing earthly friends, plucking away loved ones, breaking cherished plans and hopes. All this happens to us in the line of Divine government.

But, alas! we do often fail to remember this. We see in all these dispensations nothing but barren grief and pain. We are blind to the loving purpose of the Most High in the changes which He works; and so, like the Israelites, we dwell upon our hardships, to the weakening of our faith, to the hurt of our courage, and almost to the destruction of our souls. It was in such an hour that Moses led his people to see an illustration of God's love in the eagle's stirring up of her nest.

II. *Providence has always a progressive purpose.*

The Divine government is a disturbing force in our life, in order that it may be an agent of progress. We do not, as a rule, see this until we have moved on. There is little or nothing of the Divine to be seen in events when they are right upon us. In the spiritual sense we are all long-sighted; we see things better at a distance than we do when we are in the midst of them. And so

> ". . . the past will always win
> A glory from its being far,
> And orb into a perfect star
> We saw not when we moved therein."

It was only after forty years in the wilderness that Moses discerned fully how the Lord had disturbed these Israelites, only that at the proper time He might lead them to their inheritance.

And even so God disturbs our life that He may

force us on to something better, never for the mere sake of disturbance or punishment. If God does ask us to uproot ourselves and move out yonder, it is because yonder there is a higher possibility and a better sphere. We may not see the benefit, but God's eye is on the attainment. Consider again, from this point of view, the eagle's purpose for her young. The picture is full of suggestiveness. She flings the young out of the nest and drops them over the cliff, high above the earth. They have never been in the air before and cannot trust their wings. The ordeal is for them a terrible one. But is that mother-bird cruel? No; for why does she disturb the eaglets? Watch her, and you will understand. She swoops round and round above her young, teaching them to fly; and when they are like to fall, in their first and feeble effort, the father-bird spreadeth abroad his wings, taketh them and beareth them on his wings, that they may feel the possibility and the exhilaration of flight. That is how God deals with us. He would teach us how to use the gifts with which He has endowed us. For instance, it was hard for the lad to leave home. The parting, God knows, was sad enough. With tears and good-bye wishes he was launched out into life; but the change that was thus bitter in its beginning proved itself to be good in later days. For, by God's grace, with strong hand and healthy brain, he rose to the full use of his faculties. He became a prosperous merchant, a skilful mechanic, or an honoured professional man. He had to go

out into the world to learn self-development, self-control, and the power to serve his day and generation according to the will of God. So rose Benjamin Franklin, like an eaglet of science, till he caught the forked lightning of heaven and taught us electricity. So rose David Livingstone from being a weaver's lad to be the great missionary of the Dark Continent. So rose Thomas Chalmers from a lowly homestead in Fifeshire, and John Cairns from a farm cottage in Berwickshire, to be the heads of their respective Churches.

If it be true that a young eaglet, left alone, would become a mere weakling, starved and never able to fly, how much more true is it of a soul nestling in sin? But God in His great love awakeneth the soul, even at the cost of making the heart bleed. He sends some painful event, some convicting message of His Word, which kindles a fire in the conscience and drives the sufferer to Jesus for relief. When a party of Arctic explorers went to search, years ago, for Sir John Franklin among the snows and icebergs, they encountered frost so intense that the thermometer sank to seventy degrees below zero, and the strongest men, overcome with cold, lay down to sleep. But the leader knew that half an hour of that treacherous sleep would leave every one of them stiff in death. He roused them up; they said, "We are not cold; we only want a little rest." So the leader struck them, boxed them, bruised them, and did everything to drive off the fatal slumber. And the arm that aroused them

was the arm that saved them. So does God often deal with the souls of men, awaking them with merciful pain, scourging them into life, driving them as with fierce storm into the harbour of peace. Thus was it that He wrought salvation for John Bunyan; who tells us how, in the throes of his spiritual anguish, he wandered hither and thither in Elstowe fields, trembling often in every part of his being, tormented by supernatural terrors, fearing even the sound of the church-bell, as though it were a call to Judgment. So did he suffer; but the powers that distressed him were the heralds of redemption. For the day came when he heard simple women in a doorway talking of the love of Christ; and through their message his heart found refuge from its woe and, in the blessed light of grace, bloomed as a flower in glory of peace, poetic faith, joy and vision. Such are not seldom the ways of God as He brings salvation to His beloved.

Sometimes the minister is summoned hurriedly to a home, for a dear little child is sick. Another and unseen visitor has been there, touching the cheek with paleness and hushing the voice that rang with glee. When the life goes utterly away and there is no responsive smile and no intelligent look, the parents' hearts cry out in their anguish, "Where is the love of God?" But later comes the blessing; and their hearts follow on after that little child; and what they want to know is how they can meet her again. What a disturbance, yet what a progress in thought, belief and aspiration!

But what do *all* such experiences mean? They are only God's methods of teaching us the secret, innate forces of our life, and leading us to the development of them. The government of God is a disturbing thing at times; but, praise be to His holy name, it has always a progressive and perfecting power.

III. *Providence is always a sustaining power.*

The purpose of Moses was to quicken the faith of these Israelites in God, increase their courage, and make of them valiant heroes. There were battles to be fought and duties to be done before they entered into their inheritance. Having shown them the Divine purpose of progress, he sought to encourage and strengthen them by the assurance of God's sustaining of them. Perhaps some young, inquiring mind will ask, "Did any of the little eagles fall to the ground?" Ah! dear young heart, you have put your finger on a precious part of the kernel of the wonderful truth of our text. After the mother-bird has stirred up the nest and forced the young ones to their trembling attempt at flight, with the yawning abyss beneath them, the father-bird swoops beneath them, catches them on his wings, and bears them up. Thus, Moses in directing the attention of troubled Israel to the dealings of the eagle with its young, sought to teach them not only that God troubles and distresses men for their higher good, but that He gives them also security and peace. This was the very lesson which Jesus afterwards taught to His disciples

when He said, "Consider the fowls of the air . . . your heavenly Father feedeth them; and, "Not one sparrow falleth to the ground without your Father." "Are ye not much better than they?" For this is how God deals with us who are His children. Having cast us out into elements new and strange, so that we have felt lost and afraid, He spreads out His omnipotent wings beneath us and sustains us. Had you ever trouble, that you took from Him, which did not bring that hovering Presence nearer you? Yes, if we take our changes and our sorrows as loving summonses from Him to effort and advance, we may rely on His upholding power. He spreadeth out His wings, taketh us and beareth us on His wings. On these broad wings we are carried and by them we are guarded.

Mr Boreham has been reminding us that David Livingstone found himself, after having been in Africa sixteen years, surrounded by hostile natives, and felt that he stood face to face with death. Opening his New Testament, his eye fell on these words, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." "It," said Livingstone to himself, "is the word of a Gentleman of the most strict and sacred honour, so there's an end on't. . . . should such a man as I flee?" We find that soon afterwards this entry appears in his diary, "I feel much better now; thank God." When he returned on furlough to his native country, every place sought to honour him. As he stood up in the University of Glasgow

to be created Doctor of Laws, he was received by the students in reverential silence. In his address afterwards he told his audience that he was going back to Africa "without misgiving and with great gladness. For would you like me to tell you what supported me through all the years of exile among people whose language I could not understand, and whose attitude towards me was always uncertain and often hostile? It was this: 'Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world!' On those words I staked everything, and they never failed!"

In this matter we may all follow in the footsteps of Livingstone, and may all conquer by the same faith. The power that was sufficient for him will not disappoint us. If only we lay ourselves on God's wings, and that not in idleness, but also doing, like men, the best we may, there shall no evil come nigh us. He shall give His angels charge over us to keep us in all our ways. He will be our Refuge, and underneath us will be the Everlasting Arms. Resting on the Lord we shall renew our strength, we shall mount up with wings as eagles; we shall run and not be weary; we shall walk and not faint.

"So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still
Will lead me on
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till
The night is gone,
And with the morn those angel faces smile
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile."

XVI

THE FATHER OF JESUS

JAMES A. ROBERTSON, D.D.

"God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."—ROMANS xv. 6.

THIS is the most daring and the most revolutionary title that was ever given to God by men. Yet to-day it often falls from our lips, a grandiloquent and sonorous phrase from which the meaning has well-nigh faded. It is like a piece of worn but stately furniture in an old mansion house, a chair in which kings may have rested, now relegated to the servants' hall; something which, even in the most commonplace environment, still retains its ineffaceable touch of majesty; but waking within us now a pang of pathos rather than a thrill of awe; something with which we feel we can take liberties, when we ought to handle it with deepest, tenderest fears.

Wherever the expression occurs in the New Testament, it always betrays a mounting wave of emotion in the writer's breast—a wave of emotion which has broken at length into a white crest of whispering wonder and adoration and praise. In the religious lands of the East the pious worshipper

never uses the name of God without muttering after it, "Blessed be His name." The first Christians never spoke the words, "The Father of our Lord Jesus," without murmuring some such word of adoration, "Blessed be He!" All the feelings of awe and reverence and self-abasement which used to visit these sons of a desert faith, when they thought on the Nameless One, the Unseen, the Eternal, the Supreme—transferred mysteriously and made to cluster round the words, "The Father of Jesus!" When they wanted to make the most solemn asseveration, as if under the All-seeing Eye, it was the Father of our Lord they called to witness. "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus," wrote Paul in that letter of vehement, protesting sorrow to the recalcitrant Church at Corinth, "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not." It was a name which filled them with the same impulse which makes the devout Catholic cross himself to-day. It constrained them to bow their heads, to bow their knees. The sound of the words was a summons to worship and to glorify. It is so in the example we have chosen as a text, chosen merely because it is the first occasion of its use in the New Testament. All the others are either in thanksgiving or in prayer, benediction or doxology. At the very beginning of the letter to Colosse, Paul writes: "We give thanks to God even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you." It is an opening doxology in the Epistle to the

Ephesians, "Blessed be the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." In the heart of that Epistle we see the outward as well as the inward demeanour which the words inspired: "I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom every family in heaven and on earth is named." It comes at length as a ray of heavenly sunlight after the storm-clouds had rolled away from Corinth: "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort." For two nights and a day the forbidding Cross has kept a broken-hearted disciple from unsaying his denial; but he has hardly put pen to paper long after, when in a burst of doxology we catch the reflection of the Resurrection glory which scattered his despair: "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again to a living hope by the raising of Jesus Christ from the dead."

I wonder if we might, perchance, to-day get back behind the cold, formal ring, it seems, alas! to have, too often, when we thrust it into our devotions. I wonder if we may be able to recall a few faint gleams of its old radiance, by pondering over it in humble meditation for a spell. "The Father of our Lord Jesus"—let us try to carry the words back, on the wings of fancy, to the quiet circle of the hills round Nazareth, and to the shores of the Lake of Galilee.

On the streets of the little country town we

meet a young man as He goes to and from His day's work, with His tool-bag slung over His shoulder. Friends and acquaintances nod to Him, give Him "good-day" as He passes. We see Him clad in rough homespun, climbing the ladder at the building or repairing of some house; we watch His strong, deft, work-hardened hands wielding the hammer and saw. A fine specimen of the town's young manhood, with open manly face—our hearts go out to Him at once. And when we venture to exchange greetings with Him, we pass on with a vague and puzzled impression of something out of the ordinary about the Man. What sort of home has He sprung from? We suspect for the moment He is a nobleman's son, hiding for some reason in the lowly disguise and habit of a workman. Yet no, the people tell us that His father was Joseph, the aged carpenter, now deceased, and that His mother Mary and her family are with them still. "And yet," they add, "there's a something about Him . . . we have noticed. . . . It is strange!"

The days pass, and led by some impulse we turn in to converse with Him by the bench, for we want to know Him closer. And He lifts upon us great, dark, luminous eyes. And the unsolved puzzle in our minds about His pedigree gives way to a feeling of startled wonder. That something about the Man had nothing to do with the delicacy of human nurture. It is a rare thing that stands confronting us. To use an expressive phrase of the street to-day, it is a white soul.

A spirit clean and fresh and untarnished, like the green leaves of springtime, before the blight and dust of summer. And those eyes pierce and penetrate, till we grow pained at the rash audacity that made us intrude—the desire of the moth for the star. A humble peasant workman! But there is something about Him, something about His bearing, His personality, a compelling glory about His very humility, that sets Him far and beyond us. And then He smiles—a smile of rare and gentle beauty on a face so strong and so serene. And we are welcomed and won. But who, oh, who can He be?

Days pass, and weeks, and we meet Him again by the Lake, a Teacher with a few unlettered followers round Him, and the crowds hanging upon His words. Suppose we approach one of those disciples and begin to question him. . . . "You ask me why do I follow Him? Why, because He has brought me into the presence of God. Yes, He knows God, knows the Most High, the Ever Blessed One. No, I never inquired about His parents, or His home." . . . And the flame kindles in his eyes, as, with a sudden access of conviction that takes your breath away, the disciple says, "The God of Jesus, the God the Master is always speaking of—and speaking to—*He* is the Father of Jesus. I cannot tell how, but I know. He has made me so sure, so sure."

"The Father of Jesus—God?" we are still fain to ask each other with an old, half-doubting, questioning look upon our faces as we hear the

words anew. Perhaps some of you are repeating to yourselves the answer to a question which you learned long ago at school: "There are three Persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory." And you may be musing about the old perplexity, how there can be three in one, without confounding the Persons, or dividing the substance. Yes, even though these ideas be not consciously in our minds at all, we have been unable to carry ourselves completely back in fancy to Galilee, and forget these hard and difficult notions that have somehow crept into our Christian creed out of the ancient philosophies that lie between us and Christ. But if you were to ask those questions of this fisherman disciple who has just told you in a whisper throbbing with awe that God was the Father of Jesus, he would stare at you and wonder whether you were mad. He would say to you, "I haven't the faintest notion what you mean. I am just a simple uneducated man telling you in the plainest language what He has made me feel about Him. Come with me and listen to Him awhile. . . ." And you draw near and listen.

Yes, He is talking about Someone, very reverently and yet in the most *intimate* and familiar way. A breath blows out of the open skies and fans your cheek—a breath from the Unseen. Gentle and pure like the trembling light from a pulsing star, but convinced that He was sent; sensitive,

yet all His sensitiveness transformed into divine strength—He seems to be speaking about Someone who is beside Him, all about Him—lending a glory to the red lily at His feet; a joy to the wheeling flight of the birds overhead; a wave of life beating down through the sunshine that sweeps along the hillside; falling through the rain on the springing corn in the valley; and whispering in His heart. Someone all-great, all-knowing, without whom not a sparrow falls, who sees in secret, who can be spoken to anywhere, and best of all, alone. And listen! He calls Him the Heavenly Father—My Father—and yours. And as you listen God Himself seems to have drawn near.

And all day long you wander by the Lake, lost in thought, marvelling at this strange intimacy, so natural, so simple, so constraining (nothing like it was ever heard on mortal lips before), wondering whether it is a new and unheard-of form of madness, or whether it is true. And in the twilight as you climb the hillside, the memory of those eyes of arresting purity, and the radiant smile, and the strong reposeful face, comes back to you. And His words, startling in their beauty, their depth, their simplicity—why, they were alive! . . . Mad? *He* mad? Nay, but the one soul of perfect sanity in a world awry! It is we—we, who are suffering from illusions—great thick clouds of suspicion and doubt and care and fear, that shut God out of life. And as you approach the hill-top when the first few faint stars begin to show, you hear

the voice of one engaged in earnest talk. Dimly you discern a figure all alone. And faintly, borne on the night breeze, you catch at intervals the words, "O my Father," "Holy Father," "O Father, Lord of heaven and earth." And you steal away. You, too, have become like the disciple fisherman. Without another question you repeat, "The God of Jesus is the Father of Jesus. I know not how or why, but it is so."

Here in the text before us the Apostle Paul is bidding us with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And we are so far away from glorifying God to-day that we have given up trying even to justify Him. We are so far away from glorifying Him that we are questioning Him, asking grim and desperate questions at Him, and about Him—ay, questioning sometimes whether He exists at all—life has grown so strange and terrible and hard to understand—if indeed it can be understood. But when I want an answer to the first of all my soul's questions—I mean an answer that really satisfies—it is neither to the most subtle of the sciences nor to the profoundest of the philosophies that I turn. I find it in the presence of the most saintly friend I know. It is God's good men who are God's clearest demonstration of His own existence. For God is the truth. The Truth is a person seeking us. And He reaches us through holy personality. And from the presence of God's good men I am carried swiftly back to this amazing Man whom I have met

in fancy by the Lake to-day. And as I look into the translucent depths of those eyes as clear and deep as the evening skies above Him, and as I listen to the easy natural flow of His reverent yet intimate talk of God, and to God His Father, I say with deep emotion, with the glad relief of a tired spirit giving himself again to rest, "God! the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ—blessed be He."

But I find more than that to calm my heart in this daring name for God. I think of Him as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, not merely because Jesus was so intimate with Him, but because Jesus was so *satisfied* with Him. All the questions of your heart and mind have perhaps not been completely laid to rest by contact with that awesome intimacy. In those remote highland glens of Galilee, what could He know—you are fain to ask—of the great world with its passions of greed and hate and lust that drench the world with blood, its envy and its misery, its sorrow and shame, its anguish and despair? His was a sheltered life, and in solitary brooding and communing with God among the hills, He never had need to question Him about the darkness and sorrow of the world. The God He supposed He knew was a clear light across which no cloud had drifted bigger than the shadow of a man's hand.

There could not be a falser thing to say about Jesus of Nazareth than that. Seclusion is no shelter from mystery and tragedy and shame. He who speaks to you lived for two or three

years in one of the remote glens of Scotland, and in those short swift months he had to stand under the darkest of all the clouds that can drift across the human sky—death in its most meaningless and poignant forms, ay, and things harder far to bear than death. Nothing in all the vast inhuman horror of the Great War occurred more hard to understand than these. There was a vast difference of quantity, no doubt, but not of intensity. And I would be inclined to retort to the man who questions Jesus' experience of life: To say that Christ knew little of life because He was not a city child in touch with the great world is simply to blind one's eyes to the truth. All the known facts of His life are dead against it. He knew what sorrow meant, and hunger. He had stood by the dying Joseph's bed. Chief mourner, He had followed the coffin to the grave —only a boy. He knew what cruelty and avarice could be when turned against an unprotected widow mother. He had to battle with temptation in most powerful forms, and with despair. Yet there never flitted across His mind so much as a shadow of dissatisfaction with the God who kept Him company all the time. Shall not God clothe you—feed you, as He clothes the lilies, feeds the birds? Your heavenly Father knows. He greatly cares. Looking up to God in every vicissitude of life, He was perfectly satisfied with Him.

He had looked upon the face of death, in the house and by the wayside. He had stood outside

the great stone which blocked the door of the gloomy cave where the body of His dear friend lay. Tears were on His cheeks, and yet He lifted His eyes to heaven and said, "Father, I thank Thee. . . ." And when the Sadducees met Him with their sceptical laughter about the future life, challenging His complacent trust in God, He turned on them swiftly, and with one fierce throbbing word of vindication He constituted Himself for ever the guardian of the holiest human hope: "Ye are far astray. God is not the God of the dead but of the living. God's friends never die." Yes, face to face with the grim facts of death, He was perfectly satisfied with His God.

But more than that, beside sin and misery, in their most tangled and hopeless forms, He found the forgiving love of God equal to the worst that the human soul could bring upon itself. Step by step, down the ladder of human shame and anguish He went, and step for step, God's love went with Him—to the uttermost. To the bitter end He was perfectly satisfied with God.

And here you turn to me with questioning eye and ask, "To the bitter end? What, then, of the agony of the Garden? Was that not a wrestling of His human will with God's?" No, it was not even a questioning of God's will for Him, as He staggered beneath the burden. But as the shadows were deepening round Him, in that moment when the black hounds of a mocking Fate seemed driving Him to earth, He saw one

awful spot on the way ahead of Him, where the light of God's face seemed like to be lost for Him. That the intimate fellowship with His Father should be broken even for a moment—that was what He fain would forego. But He only prayed, "If it be possible, let this cup pass. . . ." And then ". . . nevertheless, not My will but Thine. . . ." And all the time of that dread agony and sweat and prayer the name on His lips was "Father." It is because Peter could not forget the almost unbearable pathos of it, when he tells the story, that he quotes the very word of His mother-speech which Jesus used on this occasion, "Abba! Abba!"—still satisfied.

"But," you challenge me still again, "that awful cry of God-forsakenness from the Cross? Was not all His complacent satisfaction in God disannulled by that word?" Will you listen to the cry again? Was this what He said? "It is all over. God has deserted Me. The end is nothingness and death. Vanity of vanities!" Nay, but He is still crying up to God through the black pall that lay upon His soul. And how does He address Him? Does He cry, "O God, if there be a God?" Does He say, "Great and terrible unseen Being, whoever you are?" No, but "*My* God, *My* God . . ." Oh, the love that would not let God go, even in that hour of shuddering eclipse on the Cross! Oh, the love and trust that conquered with a sigh: "Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit;" and went to sleep upon God's breast. Yes, to the

bitter end the God of Jesus was a God with whom He was still satisfied.

How perfect must be the God who could satisfy such a man! A stainless, flawless soul—there must be no shadow cast by turning, no darkness at all in the God who could satisfy such as He. Greater love was never shown by man for men than by this Jesus on the Cross. Surely the God with whom He was well pleased must be a great Well of love unutterable.

Humbly and gladly I confess that there is the last resting-place for all the fiercest questioning of my heart. God—the God with whom Jesus was so intimate, the God with whom Jesus was so satisfied, He must be a Being *like* Jesus, kin with Jesus, Father of Jesus. Nothing in all the record of the human race gleams with such splendour as this life, this holiness, this love, this death of Jesus. It is the fairest flower, the crowning glory of Creation. The great unseen Spirit that moves behind all Creation's laws—that made them, and lo! they are—cannot be less noble than His own highest achievement in this world of time. The Fountain of Life must be of essentially the same nature as the noblest and purest life that ever surged up on to the earth from its perennial spring. It would be absurd to think otherwise. I am content, with all my sin and shame and sorrow and doubt, to look upon the face of Christ, radiant with forgiving love as it shines from the Cross, and say, *That* is the clearest, surest, holiest, and

most precious glimpse of the unveiled face of God my soul will ever see, until

"To an ocean fulness
His mercy doth expand,
Where glory, glory dwelleth
In Emmanuel's land."

"The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"—blessed be His name!

XVII

THE ADVENT HOPE AND THE EVANGEL

CHARLES ROBSON, M.A.

"And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."—REV. xxii. 17.

THE first advent of Jesus Christ was an event of supreme significance, and we do well to recall with real gratitude the incarnation of the Eternal Word of God. Yet when we turn to the New Testament, we find that the look of the early Church was not backward to the first advent, but forward with eager expectancy to the great event that we designate the Second Advent. And was not the first with a view to the second? The Word of God came in the flesh to deal with sin, and whatever speculations we may indulge regarding the Incarnation as a necessary moment in revelation even apart from the fact of sin, we feel that the emphasis of the New Testament is not upon the Incarnation as a revelation of the ideal man in Christ, but rather upon this as a step towards the supreme moment of Calvary. The first advent pointed to the Cross. "Thou

shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins."

But another message is given when the New Testament speaks of the Second Advent. When Christ comes the second time it is apart from a dealing with the question of sin, and is with a view to the completion of the salvation brought in at the first coming. This was the radiant hope of the early Church. The memory of the first coming is then swallowed up in the expectancy of a greater day, the day when He who was born as a little child and was crucified in weakness will return in majesty and power that He may be crowned King of kings and Lord of lords.

And the Revelation of St John is the book of the Second Advent. Not that here only or even chiefly is our hope grounded, for our hope rests on the promise of Christ, and no New Testament writer is ignorant of this hope. But the Apocalypse of St John almost visualizes the hope for us. It is said that while we hear much of the Second Advent in the earlier letters of St Paul, the emphasis is less strong in the later letters. This may be true, and the hope yet have a real place in St Paul's later days. In his letter to the Philippians St Paul looks for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, from heaven, "who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body"; and in his second letter to Timothy, he looks forward to the day when "not to him only, but unto all them also

that love His appearing," will the Lord, the righteous judge, give the crown of righteousness.

But we call the book of the Revelation of St John the book of the Second Advent, because the great hope runs through the chapters like a golden thread, and because with wonderful sweep of mind and spirit this book sets before us the certain issue of those great spiritual principles for which our Christian faith stands, an issue of complete triumph which the Lord will give to His own when He comes the second time apart from sin unto salvation. And thus the great hope is no mere cry of selfish desire, but it is rather the energy of a living Evangel. "Maran Atha!" said the early Church, "Lord, Come!" "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

Is not the Church of to-day missing something through lack of desire for the coming Christ? "I venture to think it a great weakness of our teaching," it was said by one at the centenary of Dr Horatius Bonar, "that so little is said about the blessed hope and appearing of our great God and Saviour." "And," said another on the same occasion, "as there is nothing between us and the Cross, so there must be nothing between us and the return, not even a thousand years." Nor will the eager expectancy of the Return steal from us the sense of the real Presence of our Lord here and now. It will rather add to it a rare

joy as we remember that at any moment the cloud which separates our Lord from His friends may part, and "Him whom having not seen we yet love," we shall behold face to face, as "with hand like to our hand, the Lord throws open the gates of new life to us, and we see the Christ stand."

A threefold witness confirms this hope, and gives to us the call of the great Evangel. Does the Church at any season faint for the flaming of the advent feet? It is the Spirit who, according to my text, inspires this love-cry.

I

There is the Witness of the Spirit. This must mean that the word of revelation breathed into the human spirit by the Divine Spirit completes itself in the hope of the advent. And, whether in psalm or prophecy, this is the cry heard both in the Old and in the New Testament Church. Quite probably the seers and the singers of the Old Testament were thinking specially of what we call the first coming when, in vision and in song, they uttered the longing of the heart for God. But who that would rightly understand spiritual longing would ever dream of finding the final fruition of hope there? They builded better than they knew, and in their love-yearning for their Lord, were they not forecasting the day when the fulfiller of our hope would come, not as mortal man to suffer and to die, but as a King

cometh whose throne has been prepared from of old? It was the very glory of the vision which poesy and prophecy laid upon the altar of the nation's service that caused the Jewish people to be filled with disappointment when He who claimed to be the Christ of God came not with battle shout of warrior but in weakness and in lowliness. So great had been the promise; so poor seemed the fulfilment! And yet, through all the bright hopes of expectant lives and amid the large spaces of revelation, the Spirit was saying, "Come," and was teaching the Church to set her face towards the dawning of the day when the Lord Christ would come not to suffer but to reign. But the crown could be reached only through the Cross. For He who would lift men to the heights must dwell with them in the depths. And if only the veil were taken away from the face of Israel in the reading of the Old Testament, would not Israel turn to the Lord, and in the Christian hope of the Second Advent discern the fulfilment of all the promises made to their fathers? For the witness of Jesus is the spirit of all prophecy. And how impoverished would the Old Testament become if we were not permitted to see Christ in it, and in the hope of the Second Advent to find the answer to all the expectation of Israel! "The Old Testament," says the writer of *The Shadow Christ*, "would be the most discouraging book in the world without knowing that a new one followed it." Have you ever tried to read the Old as if there were no New Testament?

To the Christian mind this is, of course, quite impossible. For from the day when we heard the cry Maran Atha, we have heard the music of the advent hope in all the messages of the Old Testament, and we have felt how true was the seer's interpretation of it when, with fine insight into the message of revelation, he thus speaks, "The Spirit says, Come." The visions of the land of far distances had brought no comfort but for the sight of the King in His beauty. And we are surely permitted to believe that the Spirit did mean all the larger horizons that we are perceiving in our own day, and was making ready the Old Testament Church for the hour when Christ would come the second time. So the Church, the bride of Christ, has taken up the cry and in the language of the Spirit also says, Come.

II

There is further *the Witness of the Church.* The Bride says, Come. The cry of the Spirit had been in vain if the heart of the Church had not echoed it back to heaven, just as Calvary had been in vain if none had there learned to follow in the train of Jesus. But the voice that sounded upon the heights of vision was heard in the vale, and the voices of the people took up the cry of hope till in the heart of the nation was born a patient waiting for the consolation of Israel. And can we doubt that in the renewed interest of the Church in the return of

Israel's sons and daughters to the Holy Land, we are seeing the fulfilment of the nation's desire, the nearing of the hour when "The Lord will have mercy on Jacob yet, and again in his border see Israel set?" Simeon, going up to the temple to meet the Christ and to hail the first appearance of the morning star, represents the countless hosts that during the ages have looked for the coming day, whose faith has not faltered, and whose children have caught up the cry, saying as they have looked for a consolation greater than even Simeon foresaw, "Come, Lord Jesus, Come quickly."

And why should the Church take up this cry of the Spirit? Because the Church as the incarnation of the Spirit must express the mind of the Spirit, and make vocal the longing that lies in the heart of every one who has experienced the grace of the first advent. And did not the Lord Himself say, Watch? And why should the Church watch for the great day? Because it is the day when the risen and the exalted Lord will reign visibly among his people, and usher in the victory of the Divine Kingdom. I grant you that much picture symbolism is used in Scripture to depict the day, symbolism that we must never seek to interpret as if it were cold prosaic speech. Yet if the symbolism of the advent hope may be taken by us as conveying a message for our own day, it is surely this, that not by the gradual evolution of civilization, or by the mere bettering of human society, but only by the emergence in

time and through the processes of history, of the supernatural power of God as that works through the Spirit of Christ, will the divine purpose be fulfilled. And it *will* be fulfilled. Here to my mind is the essential truth of all the Apocalyptic imagery of Scripture. It assures me that the battle of the Church is not of doubtful issue, but that Jesus Christ, who even at this hour controls and directs the destinies of the Church, will Himself, by the power of His own presence, give victory to His own Cause. "There is a kind of unreasoning optimism," wrote that great saint and scholar, Dr James Hope Moulton, "which is growing in our midst, and is in great need of correction by the essential spirit of the New Testament. An optimist the Christian must be, but it does not follow that he must be optimistic as to the true future of the present world. . . . We dare not acquiesce in the materialistic conviction that this present world only needs mending, not ending, to make the ideal home for righteousness to dwell in for evermore." And, in speaking of the social activities that are so plentiful to-day, he adds, "Must we not recognize that there is a subtle peril lest in all these activities we should unconsciously assimilate ourselves to the world around us? . . . It is surely open to question whether the progress that we have ourselves seen in this wonderful generation has advanced so very greatly the happiness of the greatest number. . . . I only want to insist that we have no sufficient grounds for believing that material

progress will ever cleanse the Augean stable of this world, or even of this enlightened England, sufficiently to make it a site for the Heavenly City of our faith. Even material considerations prove to us that earth is not and cannot be an abiding city." And he thus concludes, "But we have our hope set on the Son of Man, to whom all authority is given in heaven and on earth, and in that Beatific Vision we purify ourselves as He is pure." And is not this the great hope of the Church, a hope grounded on the words of our Lord who declared that He would come again, and on the witness of His Spirit in the New Testament Church, when taking the things of Christ and showing them unto us He breathed into the Church the great hope of the Lord's appearing? And "the vision is yet for an appointed time; it shall surely come, it will not tarry." Therefore with the Spirit, the Church, the Bride of the Lamb, says, Come.

"The days are evil, looking back:
The coming days are dim:
Yet count we not His promise slack,
But watch and wait for Him."

The Witness of the Church is the second Witness.

III

There is yet a third witness, *the witness of the individual believer in Christ.* "Let him that heareth say, Come." This is not the call of the

Evangel, but it is the call to the individual believer to add his prayer to the desire of the Church and to say, "Even so come, Lord Jesus." For, if our hope of the advent must not rob us of the joy of the living presence of our Lord here and now, neither must that joy hide from us the coming of the coronation day of our King. The cry of the Church must meet its response in my own heart if I would be a sharer in the rapture of my Lord's advent. And here let me ask: Why should any particular doctrine as to the form of the great advent shut anyone out from the spiritual fruitage that is dependent upon the radiant hope of the Church? St Peter speaks of looking for and hastening unto the coming of our Lord. Does this mean that by my lack of expectation, by my personal failure to fulfil my own share in the preparation for the great day, I may retard the hour of the advent? The words of the Apostle would seem to indicate this. Then the first great preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ is to believe in the reality of that coming, to send hope forward to greet the dawn, and, like Abraham, to salute the promise afar off. And St John would tell us that we are missing something for ourselves if we do not say, Come. We are keeping back the divinely intended fruition of the Church's life and service if Maran Atha has no place in our vocabulary of prayer and ardent desire. For, first of all, *our personal life thus becomes disjoined from the hope of the Church.* Our own life is bound up with the life of the

whole Church, and we cannot be effective members of the body of Christ if we separate either consciously or heedlessly from the Spirit's promptings which are surely the call of the directing Head. If the Spirit and the Bride say, Come, we must join in the call. To contract ourselves in any way out of the fellowship of the Spirit is to impoverish our deepest life. We have heard and we must speak, else we lose the radiant and the abundant life God means for each of us. Therefore "let him that heareth say, Come." *Further, by standing outside the call we lose a powerful secret of Christian character.* "Seeing ye look for such things," said Peter, "be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless." Here is an impulse to character that we cannot afford to pass by. And St John would here agree with his brother apostle, for he assures us that if we forget the hope we lose the "moment by moment" desire to be like Him. "Every man that hath this hope set on Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure." And without this hope do we not miss the right sense of the relative worth of life's gains? If we believe that our Lord may at any moment appear, shall we spend our days placing an undue emphasis on what will then pass away? The ambitions of a day will not count for much if we are careful to have our treasure laid up in Christ. And as this hope becomes more vital, personal character will the more be transformed by it. Dr John R. Mott has told of certain students who kept back from

Bible study because of their fear that the study would bring an imperative call for a changed character. Our relation to the hope of the coming Christ will make a difference in the tests of life and in the secret pursuits of the soul. In the light of the great appearing, how will certain matters look which to-day we are stressing so greatly? Will the first become last and the last first?

> "When earth breaks up and heaven expands,
> How will the change strike you and me
> In the House not made with hands?"

If Jesus were to-day seen walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, how would our pursuits look? If Christ were seen standing among us in this day's worship, how would our sacrifices look? And any moment He may come in upon us. Surely in the blessed hope of the advent we have a wooing and an urgent call to holiness.

Then without the radiant hope of the advent our life misses a certain inspiration to service. Whether Christ come soon or late, is it not true to say that the time is short? We must therefore buy up every opportunity for service. And will not the inspiration of Christ's appearing speed us forward to realize the urgency of the Evangel? The impulse of the words, "The evangelization of the world in this generation," would be greatly intensified if we believed that in this generation Christ might come. How mighty

would the impulse prove if we believed that Christ might come to-day! For, if with longing heart we say, "Lord, come," we shall surely go to the thirsty multitudes with the Gospel and call all who thirst for living springs to stoop down and drink of Him. We shall take up the word, "Let him that is athirst come." If earnestly looking up we learn to say, "Even so come, Lord Jesus," we shall then quickly learn to add, with face and voice toward the world, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

IV

These, then, are three witnesses and they agree in one great hope, a harmony that impresses us with the urgency of the Evangel. *So last of all we come to speak of the threefold witness and the Evangel.* When St John in the Revelation sends out his message to the Church, it is no call to a dreamy ease that is concerned only with personal salvation. And the voice is not only the corporate call of the Church, it is the love-yearning of the individual, "Let him that heareth say, Come." He who knows the joy of the redemption that our Lord brought in His first coming, will not be slow to join with his Lord in bringing many sons to glory. Those who have already drunk from the living waters will find their chiefest joy in leading thirsty ones to the same fount of satisfaction. The great evangelistic passion will burn in the heart of him who

looks for the coming of Christ. Would you wish to be alone on that day, without any sheaves to offer to the Lord of the harvest? The very hope of the advent will give you the message for life's thirsty ones. We have ourselves come to the well bringing no coin stamped at the world's mint, but only a thirst that nothing will quench but the waters of the fountain, and is not this our witness?

"I came to Jesus, and I drank
Of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
And now I live in Him."

But there are many whose chief pain is that they do not have a conscious thirst for Christ, nor any emotional longing that sends them to the fountain. Does the advent hope have any Gospel for the life that knows and would will the right but yet has no thirst for it? "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." "But, Lord, I forsook Thee and hewed out for myself broken cisterns that can hold no water."

"I have not sought Thee, I have not found Thee,
I have not thirsted for Thee:
And now cold billows of death surround me,
Buffeting billows of death astound me—
Wilt Thou look upon, wilt Thou see
Thy perishing me?"

What answer can the Evangel give to a life such as this? Long ago, in the heart of a prophet,

the chord of love's music, of love strong as death, was struck, and the strains have sounded through all the days—"I was ready to offer an answer to those that consulted Me not; and to suffer Myself to be found of those that had sought Me not. 'Here am I, here am I,' I said to a people that call not upon Me." Surely here is the Gospel for me if I thirst not and if my want of thirst is my pain. Christ is here to be found of me, He is here for the purpose of being found, God in Christ is thirsting for me who have not yet thirsted for Him!

"Yea, I have sought thee, yea, I have found thee;
Yea, I have thirsted for thee;
Yea, long ago with love's bands I bound thee,
Now everlasting arms surround thee:—
Through death's darkness I look and see,
And clasp thee to me."

Is this not a Gospel worth preaching? And is not the hope that gives strength to such a Gospel a hope worth cherishing? Thirsting or bemoaning our want of thirst, let us to-day drink of the well of Christ's love. And having heard the Spirit and the Bride say, Come, we shall surely join in the ardent prayer, "Maran Atha!" "Lord, Come." And having heard the Lord's own response, "Behold, I come quickly," let us take up the cry of the Spirit and the Bride and say continually, "Even so come, Lord Jesus."

XVIII

GRACE THAT GOES FOR NOTHING

A. Boyd Scott, M.C., B.D.

"The grace He showed me did not go for nothing."—1 Cor. xv. 10.

One of our poets has said that "many a flower is born to blush unseen, and waste its sweetness on the desert air." We have all felt that. We invade remote hills and moorland places that are seldom visited by man, to find them lavishly adorned with beauty—beauty of flower, of rock and stream and airy sunshine; and we feel that it is a prolific waste, an abundance of loveliness that "goes for nothing." We are wrong, partly through conceit; because, although it may be as Dean Inge has said, that "the Beauty of the world is the strongest evidence we have of the goodness and benevolence of the Creator," it is merely conceit on our part to imagine that these high gardens are infertile of purpose unless hedged by our attention. Again, we are wrong through ignorance, as a little insight and reflection will always make plain. We shall readily learn that every speck of life in all that wilderness —and every speck of everything there is a speck

of life—is responding to all the grace of a bountiful God, that teems and flourishes there. I prefer Robert Louis Stevenson to the elegaic Gray, as an interpreter of the perfect vivacity of all that breathes "the desert air."

> "Where braid the briery muirs expand,
> A waefu' an' a weary land,
> The bumble-bees, a gowden band,
> Are blithely hingin';
> An' there the canty wanderer fand
> The laverock singin'."

Fishes and birds and flies, and all the creatures of air and hill and stream, are living out their being in all its fullness. What we call the silence of the moorland is in reality so high a chorus of vitality and gratitude that it escapes our dull and prepossessed attention.

If you would find any place wherein the bountiful beauty and love, the Grace of God, goes for nothing, do not think to find it anywhere in the fields, anywhere on the hills, anywhere on the unvisited moors, anywhere in the depths of the sea, or among the farthest stars! There is only one place wherein the Grace of God goes for nothing, and that is *in the hearts of men and women.* Everywhere else, every living thing goes forth in the full measure of its being, in the uttermost capacity of its life, to the bountiful Grace of God. Only in the heart of man is that grace sometimes found, nay, frequently found, to go for nothing. I would ask you to reflect with

me upon this tragic circumstance; and towards this end I would submit to you certain illustrations, from the lives of men and women like ourselves, of the sterility that befalls the lavish Grace of God towards them.

I. The first of my illustrations has to do with illness and our recovery from it. Those of us who have undergone a severe illness, or even a minor malady that laid us aside for a time, will recognise the reality of what I am about to say. We know the alarm, or, at least, the uncertainty with which the experience affected us. We can recall the unbounded gratitude which filled us when danger passed and new health like a new dawn came over us, body and spirit. We can recall the simplification of our life which we envisaged, as we waited and waxed strong, the pure vows and the holy resolves we made. Verily, we tasted then in our souls a grace of restoration and revival throughout us in which we saw God. Then we passed back to the world. But when we thus pass back to the world again, does it never happen that the visions we saw and the vows we made in that cloister of our sickness, falter and fade and sometimes die altogether? Here, I think, we may truly say that the Grace of God has gone for very little; in the end, it is possible, for nothing. . . . Benjamin Jowett, who was Master of Balliol, has said that "the memory of some illnesses has been, in the mind of the sufferer, the best recollection of their lives, the image of Christ crucified brought home to them, to which

they have turned again and again in times of sorrow and temptation." That is a very lofty view to take of it. But something like that should go on with us for ever in our life, from the remembrance of God's grace in illness. Whittier, during one of his serious illnesses, wrote these words: "I think sickness has a wonderful effect in fanning into life the half-extinguished conscience." You will agree that this is true. But our conscience, thus fanned into white fire at such a time, should be a light thereafter for ever in our life. Some of us will bear in our bodies the scars of some serious illness to our dying day. We should also bear in our souls, to our dying day, the unforgotten and living signs and stigmata of the Grace of God.

II. Take now a second illustration from the life of men and women like ourselves, of the sterility we let come on the Grace of God. Many men and women in their youthful days have committed some stupid, wayward or sinful folly, of which it is said on all hands that retribution and disability inevitably pursue it. But they escaped! Their escape amazed them. It seemed to them like a miracle. It was a miracle. It was due to the wonderful, forgiving, revitalising patience, mercy and grace of God. That is the meaning of it. Clearly or dimly they themselves recognise that. Some of them never forget it: the grace is permitted to work its full work from that day onwards. But others?—there are others who say secretly to themselves, "Ah! all that

the preachers and other alarmists amongst the elder people said of the danger and destructiveness of these things is wildly exaggerated. I took no harm. Here and there I may return to do as I did!" And, behold, the grace now deserts them; the judgment falls; the sin comes home! The reason of the calamity is simply this: Grace, that has been allowed to go for nothing, becomes sterile, and afterwards fails.

III. There are several other instances with which I might engage you, of the bountiful Grace of God that many allow to go for nothing. That holy book the Bible is such an instance. The Bible is at our hand every day of our life, the veritable treasury of the incarnate Grace of God. This is the book of which the most daring and untrammelled thinker of a hundred years ago said, "He that has lost God can find Him again in this book, and toward him who has never known Him it wafts the breath of the Divine Word." This is the book which, when it was first put into their hands, brought our Scottish fathers to their knees, whom nothing else in all the earth could bring to their knees, their tongue loosed in a pæan of praise, their faces streaming with tears of gratitude. And yet, O men and women, how many let all this grace go simply for nothing!

So, too, I might speak of the living presence of the Spirit of Christ. Christ by us, Christ waiting at the very door of our heart, longing to fill our loneliness with Himself, our weakness with His own strength, our tempted lives with

the power of a divine resistance; and yet how many let all this grace go for nothing, for want of a single gesture and breath of prayer!

So, too, I might speak of the tangible provision of grace that is provided for us in the Blessed Sacrament. Here do we feed upon the bread of God, and drink the royal wine of heaven, laying aside each earthly load, tasting afresh the calm of sin forgiven. And yet, how many are negligent of this ineffable grace, and let it go for nothing!

IV. I would speak at length of these, but time will not permit. Let me, however, offer you a final and homely instance of the sterility of God's good grace. This is the wonderful grace God lavishes upon us in our family life. Homes such as ours are almost supernatural channels of the love and sweetness of God's grace. I am making no idealized image of them in my mind. I am thinking of the average Scottish home, with all its defects of temper and disposition, all its transient bickerings and glooms, "when tempers are short in the morning," or at any other time. Let it be that such homes have been baptised into the religion of our fathers: we have only to set them in the perspective which a survey of the homes of man in times past and still in pagan quarters affords, to realise indeed, that they are well-nigh supernatural channels of the love and sweetness of God, by which the inmates of them can be enriched with heavenly communions. And yet are there no instances

of such a home being taken so carelessly for granted, so forgetfully, so negligently, that this Grace of God which wells and flows in them goes for next to nothing? Are there no sons and daughters who so regard and treat their home, not realising that in such a bield they are nearer the peace of heaven than they shall ever be in this life again, not realising too, that a day may come when, looking back to a hearth and a family circle that are no more, they shall be visited by a great and even tearful regret, a gnawing sense of a sweet grace of God in life which so foolishly they allowed to run to waste? Are there no husbands and wives in such homes who, as the years pass by, come to treat the bountiful Grace of God which their home enshrines as a forgotten thing? In their early married life their home thrilled with a joy in which they saw the good Grace of God face to face. Their home can be like that to the very end (although it is not always so), matured indeed, and mellowed as in an afternoon sunshine. The sunshine of afternoon is the loveliest light of all; and the afternoon years of two lives, that were wedded in the morning by God's grace, can be—nay, I say, should be, at their fullest then, with a love that is chivalrous, thoughtful, kind, uttered and fulfilled. So in the afternoon and so to the evening time of wedded love. I can tell you in what fashion such love comes to its eventide, if only the Grace of God, which it is indeed, is remembered through the years. I can tell you in the words

of the sweetest song that ever was written of love that goes down the brae, remembering!—

"John Anderson, my jo John,
We clamb the hill thegither;
And mony a cantie day, John,
We've had wi' ane anither:

"Now we maun totter doun, John,
But hand in hand we'll go,
And sleep thegither at the foot,
John Anderson, my jo."

Brethren, I leave to you, for your own further meditation, these illustrations of the Grace of God, which so often men and women allow to go for nothing. Examine yourselves and see if this ingratitude in any way marks you. And if it be so, seek in humility to remember and cherish the Grace of God; for truly, as St James saith, "God gives grace more and more. . . . To the humble He gives grace."

XIX

PAN MORE DEADLY THAN MARS

HUBERT L. SIMPSON, M.A.

"The forest devoured more people that day than the sword devoured."—2 SAMUEL xviii. 8.

THAT statement is taken from one of the vivid battle scenes which the Old Testament writers were such adepts at describing. Far and wide the tide of battle had run throughout the pleasant land, sucking in more and more of the people into its maelstrom. It developed into an action in which everybody seemed to become involved. "So the people went out into the field against Israel: and the battle was in the forest of Ephraim. And the people of Israel were smitten there before the servants of David, and there was a great slaughter there that day of twenty thousand men. For the battle was there spread over the face of all the country: and the forest devoured more people that day than the sword devoured."

We, too, are painfully, personally, and practically aware of the fact enunciated here, that the accompaniments and consequences of war can be far more disastrous than the actual fighting. It

is the unexpected that happens, the unlooked-for that piles up the casualties. It was the place of shelter that shattered: the green sward was grimmer than the grey sword, the sylvan glade than the sharpened blade.

And it was all so easily done. Tragedies usually do take place when the sun is shining. It is only your third-rate novelist who seeks to freeze your blood with doings on "a night in which you would not have turned a dog out of doors." It was on an autumn Bank Holiday that life for every one of us began its revolutionary change. And moral disasters, like physical ones, generally occur in happy autumn fields and vernal woods. The major damage is caused by such trifling things. "We are driven from a useful life, like travellers from the woods, not by lions but by midges." For one among us who ever has occasion to carry a Winchester repeater, scores of us need to arm ourselves with midge lotion.

You would never think that those pleasant woods of Ephraim would turn traitor—the orchard closes of home. They afford some of the most charming woodland scenery that Syria knows. From noble oaks standing in luxuriant grass shot with a rich variety of wild flowers, the wood pigeons rise in clouds, and jays and woodpeckers flash and chatter in every glade. As I rode under just such an oak as arrested Absalom's flight, where one could picture the broken lines and a rout through the open forest, and was

allowing my grey Arab to pick his way while I felt in my saddlebag for my Bible in order to refresh my memory about details in the old story, I lost my pith helmet and puggaree in the branches of the spreading tree, so far repeating Absalom's experience.

Now the wonderful, the divine thing in reading the Old Testament stories of the Book which contains for us the word of God, is that you never feel that these are merely "tales of old forgotten things and battles long ago." You cannot help feeling that these things were written for your edification who find that the battle of life is spread over the face of all the country, so that everybody is drawn into it. Why is the sacred writer at such pains to tell us the details of the wonderful head of hair which Absalom possessed, and of his overweening pride therein, if not that he may also tell us how this same feature was the means of the debonair young rebel's undoing? He would not have done so if it were not always true that great natural gifts may become snares and dangers to their possessors if they are not used for the glory and in the service of God. He wishes us to realize, through a graphic instance of the eternal truth, that a man is liable to be undone at his strongest point, and that those who presume upon natural aptitudes are often left hanging between heaven and earth.

And it is because of that perpetual search for the deeper meanings of trifling events, the continual looking from the straw to the blowing of

the wind that bears it, that I think we are justified in seeking to penetrate this wood of Ephraim a little farther than the mere surface facts of the tale would take us. For of the battle of life also it is true that the forest devours more people than the sword devours. The *Odyssey* of life is as long and tragic a tale in its way as the *Iliad.* The old Greeks showed their knowledge of the fact that the wood can be as dangerous as the sword, when Homer makes Odysseus inquire: "Did all those Achæans return safe with their ships, or perished any by a shameful death aboard his own ship, or in the arms of his friends, after he had wound up the clew of war?" This is the universal experience of the race; and they have hidden the warning in their tales.

"Some people's sins are evident," says St Paul, "leading the world to an estimate of their characters, but the sins of others lag behind." That is the apostle's way of stating the too familiar truth that, although there are some notorious cases in which people fall openly in the sight of the world, cut down by the sword of the enemy, there are far more who succumb in the dark and hidden depths of the forest, unmarked by the public gaze. Yet is their fate none the less sealed than that of those more notorious failures. Against the open and grosser sins there is probably the less need for most of us to arm ourselves, just because we know the sharp edge of a sword and what it can do in the way of destroying life. But the wood devours far more than the sword.

It is in the secret places of life and thought that most of the mischief is wrought. And none of us can halloo, because none of us is clear of the wood.

One of the old commentators, taking the word "devour" literally, explains that the fate which those who fled to the forest for refuge met with was to be devoured of the wild animals it sheltered, who had their dwelling there. And readers of Dante will recall how he opens his great drama by representing himself as suddenly, when half-way through life, finding himself in the midst of a dark wood infested with wild beasts.

> In the midway of this our mortal life,
> I found me in a gloomy wood, astray,
> Gone from the path direct: and e'en to tell,
> It were no easy task, how savage wild
> That forest, how robust and rough its growth,
> Which to remember only, my dismay
> Renews, in bitterness not far from death.

And he tells how he encountered first a panther, and then a lion, and then a she-wolf, and how each successive encounter exposed him to fresh danger.

That is Dante's way of telling us the same story and giving us the same warning. He found that it was in the mid-years of life that a man is apt to fail and succumb. Having escaped the violent edge of the sword—the more flagrant sins, he was in danger of going down before either the panther or the lion or the she-wolf—that is

to say, before luxury, before pride, and before avarice.

The danger for most of us, especially those in the mid-years of life, all the experts seem to be agreed, is that we should become entangled in that which lured us to enter it at first because it looked attractive, and seemed to offer us a means of shelter and a way of escape in the battle of life. It may be something which in itself is innocent enough at first, but which proves our undoing if it come to entangle us so that it prevents us from going onward and upward.

I met a man recently whom I had known many years ago as a deacon in a certain church, one who took a great lift of work among lads, and who was known for his enthusiasm in all good causes. When he removed to another city he had at first sought out the place and the people who could most help him and whom he could most help in the higher pursuits of life. But he confessed that gradually the pressure of business had so engrossed him, that first he seemed to have no time for his old delights, and then little inclination. He admitted that he was more accusing than excusing himself when he said that the business of making a living had prevented him in the making of a life. He was the kind of man who would never have fallen by the sword, but he was being devoured by the wood, as he not unsorrowfully admitted.

And when we consider our own case, must we not admit that we are entangled by things in a

way we had never meant to allow ourselves to be? The stream of life is being dispersed in spray. It may be our vocation, which has become an avocation, it may be our pleasures, it may be just our general mode of life—no sharp and cutting edge of a sword, but just a sense of having got so entangled in lesser concerns that we are in danger of never getting out of the wood at all. The good things of life have kept us from the best things. We are held, enslaved by the entangling undergrowth of the occupations and interests which we never imagined, when first we became absorbed in them, were going to separate us from God, and to hold us back from taking our place in the van with the soldiers of Christ.

It is just the tragedy of to-day that the forest devours more than the sword, that so many are lost to the cause of Christ and the Kingdom of God through no open sin, but just through entanglement with what our Lord called "the worry of the world and the lure of riches." We are being devoured of the wood if our own hearts condemn us that we are not so sensitive to the voices of the Spirit as once we were. If we are content with second-bests and unworthy compromises; if we have lost the edge of our appetite for the beautiful and noble things after which we used to hunger and thirst; if we are conscious of having lowered our standards of reverence, or of rectitude, or of morality; if we must admit to ourselves that we are not so

punctilious in the observance of religious duties as once we were, then the forest has us in thrall.

We may pass successfully, and even with a margin of credit, all the standards of the world around us; and yet, if we know that we are not making the most of our spiritual capacity, then we are counting for less than God meant that we should count for in His world. The peril of the forest is just that we should become entangled with things which are not wrong in themselves, but whose tragic grip of us consists in this, that they are holding us back from all that we might be. They are brushwood entanglements, preventing us from doing all that God made us capable of doing, and from being all that He would have us to be. Our danger is, not that anybody should be able to point a finger at us, but that no one will be the better for having known us; not that we should do anything conspicuously wrong, but that we should never do anything splendidly right; not that we should be guilty of pursuing unworthy ends, but that we should fail of man's chief end, which is to glorify God.

The words in which the story of Absalom's fatal entanglement are told contain one of the grimmest pieces of irony to be found in the whole of Scripture. I can recall nothing in literature and history more sardonic than this: "And Absalom rode upon his mule, and the mule went under the thick boughs of a great oak, and his head caught hold of the oak, and he was taken up between the heaven and the earth; and the mule that was

under him went on." The man was left high and dry while his mule went on! The man got stuck behind, and his beast went on without him! His head caught hold of the oak. Pity it had never caught such a firm hold of anything elevating before! And if it hadn't been for Joab's impertinent interference, the Bible would have left him hanging there, kicking his ineffectual heels in the air, while his mule went careering on. The city is full of stories like that, of men of great ability and great promise, whose very gifts become their undoing. Their latter end was emptiness—hanging in mid-air; and the business that was under them went on.

"The forest devoured more people that day than the sword devoured." That is to say, Pan is a great deal more deadly than Mars. The pursuit of pleasure, the shameless chase after selfish luxury, is a far greater catastrophe for a man and a nation than the hard trial of war. Some of us should pray to be delivered from prolonged life rather than from sudden death. If, as a nation, we have escaped the sword only to fall into the entanglements of the forest; if we have fled from Mars only to fall into the hairy paws of Pan, our latter end is worse than our former fate. And this deadly snare of pleasure, holding us back from the fulfilment of life and destiny, is far more widespread than the devastation of war. A French writer on Pascal has said that Christ has two great enemies, the god Priapus and the god Pan, and that of the two the

latter is the more deadly. That is to say, that you can vanquish sensuality in its ugliest forms, but the easy-going idea that everything should be taken as it comes, and that nothing is really more important than anything else, is death to all moral earnestness and to all Christian endeavour.

And that is why it behoves those of us who care at all for the well-being of the nation's soul to resist all the insidious attempts which are being repeatedly made in so many quarters to filch from us the safeguards of the spiritual life which have been handed down from the fathers. It is possible for you to argue, and even to argue speciously, for the laxer observance of the Sabbath, and for the letting go of customs and habits which were perhaps promulgated and defended in the past with more bitterness than wisdom. But if you even wish to argue for the abandonment of these things, you betray at once that you are none of Christ's. For the question with Christ's men and women can never be, Is it wrong? or even, Is it lawful? but only, Is it expedient? Is it the best? To treat these questions with even indulgent tolerance is to tamper with the locks of the King's palace. It is in effect not only to take the crutch from the weaker brother, but also the crown from the Redeemer, whom we can never too highly or too scrupulously honour. It is the kind of act that should be classed with the crimes of selling the pass and betraying military secrets in time of war.

And even while you are doing it your own soul is turning King's evidence against you. For you owe everything that you possess of iron in your will and of salt in your character to that old discipline which guarded the outposts because they were the King's territory as much as the citadel. Any sweetness of disposition and lovableness of nature that you still possess witness against you even while you are violating their springs. And even in your mad revolt you will never altogether get away from the man that once you were.

You may break, you may shatter the vase if you will,
But the scent of the roses will hang round it still.

XX

THE MINISTRY OF SYMPATHY

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"Then I came to them of the captivity at Tel-abib, that dwelt by the river of Chebar, and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days."—EZEK. iii. 15.

SORROWFUL indeed is this picture of Ezekiel and his compatriots exiled at Tel-abib on the banks of the Chebar. The fortunes of Israel were at a low ebb. Nebuchadnezzar had captured Jerusalem and had driven its inhabitants into exile in Babylonia. Concerning his visit to his fellow exiles at Tel-abib, Ezekiel relates: "I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days." "I sat where they sat." At first sight this piece of detail does not seem to call for any special comment. Is not this young priest's attitude in keeping with the circumstances in which he found himself? It does not seem an unusual proceeding for him thus to associate himself with his countrymen in those disastrous hours, and silently muse with them over the common calamity.

Nevertheless, his action is capable of more sublime interpretation—for it is to be noted that

Ezekiel was a member of a priestly tribe—separate and distinct from the people by law and tradition. He was a representative of the most exclusive section of Jewish society, and his attitude on this occasion involved a complete break with long cherished opinion. Yet he seemed to read the situation at a glance. He realised that nothing was to be gained by maintaining his customary attitude of aloofness. He knew that these shivering and stupefied men and women needed his comforting presence at that hour. So he threw tradition to the winds. He broke with every force that would stifle his God-given feelings of redemption, and he has left for us this inspiring record: "I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days." We can readily understand what his quiet sympathetic presence must have meant to these despairing people. Their religious leader, the official administrator of their rites and ceremonies, had laid aside the pomp and circumstance of his office, and had come down to mourn with them awhile. In their loneliness they became aware that a great human soul was sitting among them, one who knew the depths of their grief and was willing to give them the silent sympathy of a heart that knew and understood. I am sure that when these seven days of stupor and sorrow were ended, these exiles must have felt braced by the fellowship and gracious condescension of one in whose hands reposed the leadership of their national and religious destinies.

This compassionate attitude of Ezekiel is one whose importance we have been slow to apprehend. The incident itself forms a silent tribute to the humanity of the Scriptures. The Bible is an intensely human book. There are few if any situations in daily life without their Scriptural counterpart. This inspired record can never become stale or outworn, for it has a message for the human heart in all generations. When we make a survey of history, we recognise indubitably that the men who have lifted others to higher levels of living and thinking have been companions of this Israelitish seer. There is doubtless a certain stoical bravery in the attitude of the hermit and the monk who, renouncing the comforts of companionship, have betaken themselves to some quiet retreat "far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife." Do we not, however, admire more fervently the wiser perceptiveness of those who have moved amid the commerce and conflict of life, who have gone down beside their brothers and sisters in bondage, and pointed them to One who alone can help them to leap and loose their chains? Do not our hearts thrill as we read the story of dauntless souls like Livingstone and Carey, Chalmers and Duff, who saw the heathen of Africa, India and New Guinea bound by the fetters of idolatry and superstition, and who crossed the seas and endured countless hardships—that they might sit where their dusky brothers and sisters were sitting and let the light of a wondrous, emancipating Gospel steal into

their darkened lives? Is there not something to set our souls aglow with wonder at the spectacle of those who know about the social problems of our age, because they have been where the social problems are—those gentle knights-errant in the slums of our great towns and cities, who are trying to help drink-sodden men and women to rise to higher things? History will accord the greater meed of praise to the Christian worker in the slum, while those who have written and spoken on social circumstances, with which, however, they can claim only theoretical acquaintance, will go down to posterity "unwept, unhonoured and unsung."

Ezekiel's attitude might with profit be more fully embraced by the Church of our time. We sometimes hear the complaint that the pulpit of to-day is sadly deficient in humanity. We are told that much of our preaching is ethereal, mystical and philosophical, and bears very little relation to human life and its clamant needs. We spend precious hours in developing theories which do not minister to the spiritual sustenance of our hearers. When Casaubon, the great French scholar, was being shown over the hall of the Sorbonne on the occasion of his first visit to Paris, his guide told him: "This is where the theologians have disputed for five hundred years." "Indeed!" was the reply, "and pray, what have they settled?" Does not this caustic query serve to reveal that there has been much idle piety practised throughout the years of the

Church's history? Men have been engaged in intellectual pursuits which have not tended to elevate the life and conduct of their fellows. There is a growing need for the pulpit to abandon dreamy abstractions and come down to the point of view of the pew. "I sat where they sat." That must be the daily motto of every earnest herald of the Gospel. Assuredly a seat in the pew will accomplish wonders for the occupant of the pulpit. He will henceforth visualise his people's needs. His preaching will touch life at every point and will go home with comfort and conviction to the hungering hearer. The end and aim of preaching is to set man right with God. That glorious consummation cannot be achieved, unless there is a genuine, sympathetic, prayerful attempt to discover what bars the way to this reconciliation. That attempt will be successful only when the ministry is an intensely human one, when in interchange and social fellowship, pulpit and pew begin to understand one another, and sermons are found rich in spiritual power and persuasiveness from the practice of this prophetic attitude, "I sat where they sat."

To the pew also comes with equal force the summons to follow Ezekiel's policy. The pulpit requires that the pew understand something of the nature of the task which it has undertaken. It is the fashion in some quarters to speak somewhat foolishly about the duties of the ministry. To enter such a vocation in their minds is to

ensure for oneself a life of dignified repose, so feeble is their conception of what is involved in the acceptance of the claims and responsibilities of this office. Never was the ministry confronted with so great difficulties as in these frankly materialistic days, and it demands for the successful discharge of its solemn obligations the ceaseless sympathy and prayers of those among whom its lot is cast. Nothing more weakens ministerial effectiveness than the absence of sympathetic discernment on the part of Church members, while words are inadequate to describe the joy that surges in the soul of Christ's ambassador as he stands in the pulpit clothed in all the panoply of his people's prayers. God grant that such a spirit of mutual supplication and sympathy may deepen and develop as the years go by, so that Christ's servants may be used to help each other on the way to that more abundant life which is promised to the faithful at the breaking of the day.

Ezekiel's attitude also contains a plea for a deeper sympathy in the world of human affairs. "Put yourself in his place." This was Charles Reade's motto for all social disagreements. Were such a counsel universally followed, much of the unrest of modern days would be dissipated. Yet we are so strong about our own point of view, that we think it is the only point of view, and we do not seem to be able to see the other side of the picture. In these disputes in the realm of industry much misery might be avoided, if those

involved could obey Ezekiel's dictum: "I sat where they sat." Surely there is a common ground on which both sides can meet for the amicable and equitable settlement of all differences.

Would not great good result also if the scattered ranks of Christ's followers could emulate Ezekiel in his conduct at Tel-abib? We rejoice to see the increasing spirit of unity among the various branches of Christ's Church. Such a happy state of affairs has been brought about by the exercise of sympathetic imagination. We are seeking to realise one another's position, to find whither our spiritual aims and purposes are tending, and nothing but good can accrue to the Church at large from the exercise of this spirit of comprehending fellowship. We respond to the timely suggestion of a noted preacher of our age when he asks, "If among all the denominations, we sought for the largest common denominator, would not the explanation be productive of great spiritual wealth?" United in a common love to our Lord Jesus Christ, in a common devotion to His all-availing Cross, nothing could stem the advance of the forces of the Kingdom into human hearts and lives. Let us realise we all belong to a great regenerating fellowship.

> "Brother clasps the hand of brother,
> Stepping fearless through the night."

Ezekiel, in his wise sympathy, finally serves to rebuke those of us who are inclined harshly to judge the man who has fallen. How many of

us can sit with the sinner in a spirit of understanding love and pity? When someone near and dear to us gives way to some sordid temptation, what are our feelings regarding his downfall? Does not anger most frequently possess us as we think of this gross betrayal of the family honour, this stain upon the family name? Dramatic indeed is the picture which Ian Maclaren has drawn for us of Lachlan Campbell, that sternest and strictest of the elders at Drumtochty, who, when his daughter Flora wandered from the fold, immediately struck her name out of the family Bible. He was summarily dealt with by that gracious soul, Margot Howe, who was relentless in her criticism of the severity of his attitude. "Wae's me," she sobbed, "if oor Father had blotted oor names oot o' the Lamb's Book of Life when we left His Hoose. But He sent His ain Son to seek us, and a weary road He cam'. Puir Flora! Tae hae sic' a father!" The rebuke had the desired effect. That austere old man realised his awful error. The wanderer at length came home, and on the night she returned, she was welcomed with a love which she never credited her father with possessing, and her name was re-entered on the family Bible. "I sat where they sat." It is a terrible thing to see a soul sitting in that state of gaunt despair to which sin brings its victims. Yet you and I will best interpret the mind of Christ, if to the lonely wanderer we stretch forth a hand branded with the marks of the Lord Jesus; for we shall

never sit with Christ in *heaven* yonder if we deliberately avoid sitting with some soul in *hell* here. The love that descends to the uttermost of disloyalty and degradation is the love that had its consummation at a place called Calvary: "I sat where they sat." Well might the Lord of glory echo these words of His herald Ezekiel, ere He cried with a loud voice, "It is finished," and entered the darkness of death. His earthly ministry was one of comprehending consolation for the tried and the fallen. He sat where they sat. There was a memorable day, when four men lowered a paralytic through the roof of a house where the Master was preaching, and when Jesus saw him, He seemed to sense the real malady of the invalid, and the first words He said to him were, "Thy sins are forgiven thee." He saw past the physical defect to the spiritual. He saw in that invalid a great heart-agony because of sin, and He healed his soul as well as his body. He sat where the paralytic was sitting, and joy was re-born in that despairing heart. And "His touch has still its ancient power." Would that we were all more like Him! Would that we could bid depart for ever that spirit of censoriousness which so often possesses us, and with something of the mystic love of our Master, lead those who are bruised and broken by sin into health and peace again! "If we knew all," one has said, "we should forgive all."

Let us covet Christ's sympathy now and always. For still He sits among life's broken earthenware.

Still His gentle Spirit hovers very near "those that are broken in their hearts and grieved in their minds." Is there a soul before me as I speak who is conscious of a loneliness which sin can alone explain, who has come into the house of prayer scarcely knowing why or how—only realising the intolerable burden of sin unforgiven and longing, oh, so unutterably, for the peace which Christ alone can give? Be of good cheer! Christ sits where you sit to-night in that very pew, here and now. He has been with you all the time. "Have I been so long with you?" He gently asks, "and yet hast thou not known Me?" It is the query of unrecognised and unrequited love. Can you delay to answer it? Can you go out into the night again with that weight still upon your back? You may—but you need not. He waits to bless. May it be yours to cry now with Thomas of old, "My Lord and my God."